

YOUR HEART IS YOUR PURPOSE



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Prologue

When I see him being so cheerful, it is like the sun rises for me every day. He doesn't have to do much at all, but still he always puts a smile on my lips. As if this railway coach captivated my stepson, he has been playing with it all morning. He rides through imaginary valleys and across high mountains, and each time I relish seeing his enthusiasm for this toy.

I am sitting at the breakfast table and am trying to focus on the Sunday paper, but it is very difficult for me. On the one hand, my wife is preparing pancakes in the kitchen, humming, and on the other hand, my stepson is playing with his railway coach on our large sectional couch. I consider myself the happiest person on earth. I would do anything for the two of them, although I was once told that I would most likely take after my father completely.

Thoughtfully, I briefly close my eyes and turn my face towards the window. Warm rays of sunshine, heralding spring after a long winter, settle on my skin. The window is open and the chatter of various birds drifts into our flat. We also notice every time a car drives out of the village, as our house is located at the end of the village in a section of the valley. Almost every Sunday afternoon we can watch the football match live in our own living room, as the sports grounds are right next to us. And less than fifty

feet away from the house there is a stream about ten feet wide, with which I associate very fond moments.

My parents separated when I was about one year old. Then we temporarily moved into my grandma and grandpa's house, where also my great-grandma used to live and where I moved again five years ago. Another smile sneaks onto my lips as I think back to a particular and, for me, wonderful "ritual" with my beloved grandpa.

He often took me to the little stream in front of our house at the weekend, but also during the week. He didn't even have to ask me if I wanted to go with him. I could tell by the look in his eyes what he was up to, and he probably saw from my bright and curious eyes that nothing could stop me from accompanying him to the stream. We were fooling around, and I realized that he was doing everything he could to cheer me up so that I could better cope with the separation of my parents. I was still very small, but nonetheless it was clear to me that something was wrong.

Every time we went for a walk along the stream, my grandfather and I would collect stones. And that was in all kinds of weather; but what I liked best were the hours of sunshine. I enjoyed it when the sun's rays caused the flowing water to sparkle. But I also really liked watching the clouds in it and how they floated with or against the current of the stream.

When we had enough stones and enough of each size, we sat down together on the stream bank and threw them into the water. Even today I

can hear the sound of each stone plopping into the water and the different sounds they made as they varied in size.

One day my grandpa made a competition out of it. He suggested trying to see who could throw it the farthest, or who could create the biggest water fountain. It was like the Olympics for me every time, and I'm quite sure today that my grandpa kept letting me win so that I wouldn't be too disappointed. At that moment I didn't think one bit that this stream, which actually always gives me a bit of peace, strength and also familiarity, would one day cause me enormous distress.



I take a deep breath and fold up the newspaper, again casting a glance at my stepson. Relaxed, I lean forward and cross my arms on the table in front of my chest. As I do so, my thoughts drift back to my grandpa. He had one great passion, and that was his model trains in the basement hobby room of the house. He designed the biggest landscapes - green mountains with white peaks, valleys and rivers - and to go with them, he built some of his own railroads.

He always allowed me to watch him do it. An image sneaks into my head of how, as a small child and with huge eyes, I enthusiastically watched my grandfather devote himself to his hobby and with what passion and commitment he engaged in it. In his partly narrowed eyes, when he worked on quite small parts, I could still see a certain twinkle, and for me at that time it was the sparkle of enthusiasm, pride and inspiration.

His voice echoes through my head as I hear him in my mind explaining every little detail of his work. His calm and familiar voice that I miss so much. For me, as a small child, it was clear very quickly that I would share this hobby with him at some point, sooner rather than later. When his trains then drove through his collection of vehicles, the little boy in him came out every time. And I will never forget this sight in my life.

All the more pride overwhelms me when I see my stepson with that one railroad car. Sometimes I imagine I see the sparkle in my grandfather's eyes in his eyes. A pleasant squeeze fills my chest, and my thoughts drift to that special day when I gave him the railroad car.

About a year ago, my wife and stepson made me beyond happy when they moved in with me. That was a very emotional, captivating, special and important moment for me. From the beginning, I was immediately on fire for my stepson, and I instantly drew him into my heart. So I built him his first own bed, which I customized according to his wishes in pirate style. In addition, he got a gaming platform directly above it.

When we finished decorating his room, we had to move all the superfluous furniture to the attic so that we had more space in the apartment. I think we were all equally happy when the moving, mess, and clearing out was finally over.

So we set to work. I thought nothing of it and took my stepson upstairs to the attic. He really wanted to be with and around me because we had already established a very strong bond in a short time. This was one of the greatest feelings of happiness for me and also made me very proud, because I didn't know anything like this from my own childhood from my stepfather. We never managed to develop a close bond with each other, but with my stepson it was different, and for that I am very grateful. In the meantime, he is no longer my stepson, but he is my son to me, and I am very happy about that.

When we arrived in the gloomy attic, I told my son to wait briefly there by the staircase until I could pick up the piece of furniture that his mother was handing up to us. Then my plan was for us to clean out the closet together.

Our attic, like probably most attics, has only one light at the stairway. To the back, it's completely dark. At the time of the move, winter was setting in, so unfortunately it got dark very early.

Seconds later, when I finished with the piece of furniture in the attic, I first took a deep breath and checked on my wife, who puffed out her cheeks with a flushed head and widened her eyes, thus silently telling me that the piece was quite heavy. I grinned, nodded, and turned to my son. Amazed and a bit startled, I realized he was no longer there. Immediately, I called his name, pulled my cell phone out of my pocket, and turned on the flashlight.

Not a breath later, I gasped for air and found him at the very end in front of a box. At first, I couldn't believe where my son was. I got goose bumps and shivered. He was standing in front of a box in which my grandfather had stowed all of his self-made trains and even airplanes. Fascinated, he looked at the parts, I will never forget the gleam in his eyes, and that was one of the most beautiful moments in my life. My knees grew weak and I had to squat down next to him to keep from falling over.

This extremely magical moment, which in my opinion should never end, reminded me completely of the wonderful time with my grandpa. Again and again, the images of that time caught up with me. Once again I saw myself with him in the hobby room and how amazed I was admiring his collection.

To my surprise, I could hardly get my son away from the box. Every now and then he would show me a new piece and comment on it, his voice high and curious. But when my wife was already getting impatient one floor below, we struck a compromise and I allowed him to take this one little train car downstairs with him.

Since then, every week we go to the attic and marvel at our own railroad world. As soon as we climb the stairs, his fingers point to the attic hatch, and as he does, his eyes get big and start to sparkle. And those little moments always bring back memories of my grandpa. No matter where, even at the zoo, when my son stands in front of the polar bears' window full of enthusiasm. Or while walking, when he joyfully points to the sky with the words "Mom, Dad, look, an airplane."

Partly, these flashbacks to my beloved grandpa hurt a lot. I miss him with all my heart and would argue that to this day I am still not really gotten over his passing. Missing someone and understanding that you will never see them again is a very different feeling than missing someone you know you will see again.

I would describe it as a feeling of emptiness. But in the back of your mind, a voice says that you can always fill that void when you see them again. And that's how I felt when my mother met another man about a year after separating from my father and we moved in with him. It wasn't easy for me at the time to leave my grandma and grandpa and get used to a new man at my mom's side.

But fortunately for me, the man lived in the same town. So I was still allowed to visit my grandparents every weekend and spend time with them. I remember one very specific and special weekend visit when I went to a nearby train station with my grandpa and we went to see a real steam locomotive.

It was a beautiful sunny and warm day. I can still describe exactly how I felt when I saw this huge locomotive for the first time - it was nothing like the small models my grandpa had.

My heart was racing in my chest and I was very excited, so excited that at first I couldn't say anything, I was just amazed, maybe even my mouth was open. I winced briefly as steam shot out of the locomotive's vent, then my grandpa laughed loudly and heartily, and I joined in.

Even today, when we travel as a family and get to see a steam locomotive, this triggers a very specific memory in me. Especially when my son is by my side, I feel as though I've been put in my grandpa's shoes as a father figure.

Meanwhile, my son and wife sit at the breakfast table together with me and enjoy their pancakes. They treat themselves to this every Sunday morning. My son sits across from me next to his plate of railroad cars. I smile at him fondly, which he returns, while I notice the little bump on his temple that he got in a little accident last week.

My thoughts drift again, and I remember how I gave my mother and grandpa a real scare. My mother had to go to work one morning, she was training to be a physician's assistant, and during that time I was at my great-grandma's house that day. As a child, I naturally challenged her quite a bit and kept her on her toes.

Then, while changing diapers, it happened, I fell off the nursing table onto my head, where a bump immediately appeared. I can no longer say whether I screamed or not. Highly alarmed, my great-grandmother called my grandfather, who was not far away, for help. He did not hesitate for long and took me to the doctor. Thank God he gave the all-clear immediately, except for the bump I had no other injuries.

Through this experience I embraced my grandfather more and more, and the bond to him became stronger and stronger. For me, he had long been my father, although my biological father was also there at that time now and then, such as on birthdays, but I could no longer really connect with him. My grandfather was always there for me, and I could always rely on him.

My life changed abruptly when my mother got a call from my grandma one day. While my mother was still on the phone with my grandma, I noticed from her expression and her thin voice that something was wrong. When she hung up, I noticed that she was very upset, but she tried not to let on. Wordlessly, she left immediately, leaving me with her boyfriend at the time.

Although I was still very small, I immediately knew that something terrible had happened. My mother's boyfriend tried to distract me, and we played into the evening. At some point, my mother came back home. She looked pale, tired, and dejected, and I could tell by her puffy eyes that she was crying. With a sympathetic smile she sat down next to me, gave me a hug and told me that my grandfather was now with the angels and that he would watch over me. He had been riding his bicycle and had suffered a heart attack.

Thus it became clear to me that I would never see my grandpa again. A world collapsed for me. Now I no longer had a real father and no grandpa who had taken over the role of father so wonderfully. He was the male part in our family, he was everything for me, my role model and my rock.

I often asked about him as a child, and that dull and lingering pain haunts me to this day. Losing a loved one who is no longer a part of your life from one second to the next is like someone ripping your heart out alive. But what helps me to cope with the pain to some extent are the memories of my grandpa.

Chapter 1

For a long time my mother and I lived together with my stepfather in his father's house. Since 2015, I have now been living in my grandparents' house again, which means that memories of my grandfather are rekindled time and again. Sometimes I even have the feeling that he is very close to me. In the beginning this feeling made me a little bit afraid, but in the meantime a smile sneaks on my lips when I think him close to me.

And so I smile even now. Our breakfast is over by now, and I have retreated to the garden for a short while to continue reminiscing a bit about the past. Relaxed, I lay down on the garden lounger and let myself be spoiled by the warm rays of the sun.

My dear great-grandmother has unfortunately passed away in the meantime. As a result, we agreed that my grandma would move to the second floor because of her age, while I now occupy the second floor with my wife and son. As already mentioned, our house is located in a valley, and not far from it is the stream. Until 1999, it was a little closer to our house.

But due to a severe flood, when our entire village was under water, the course of the stream was changed so that we would not have to experience such a terrible event a second time in the future. The year 1999