

Grandpa's Coat

By Uri Annon

I got the coat from my grandma's trembling hands. Her eyes were filled with tears, but she was strong enough to hold them inside. The streetlight was flickering on and off through the window cracks. The coat was long and grey. The feeling of the Mongolian cashmere wrapping around my shoulders reminded me of a familiar warm touch. The smell was of the finest Italian cologne. I felt like I was walking among perfectly shaped garden beds. On the right, blooming red roses projected their shiny presence upon me. On the left, innocent white tulips were generous enough to lend me some of their purity. My grandma fixed my collar, wiped the tears off her cheek, and said my grandfather and I were similar.

I buttoned up the coat's three smooth and shiny buttons. I could not help but smile. I was excited to wear this coat, it meant a lot to me. The wind howled and rocked outside, but the air inside stood still. I patted the coat's shoulders, trying to remove the dust accumulated from years of sitting in that dark, lonely closet. The dark grey color the coat once possessed was fading into a lighter grey. Threads hung from several parts of the coat, and a small burnt patch changed the texture below the left pocket. I wondered how that happened. I was too small to fill the coat perfectly, it lingered well below my waist, and my shoulders were not as wide. My grandma said I would grow into it, but I wondered if I could ever fill this coat as I stared at myself in the mirror. Through the coat and my grandma, I could feel a connection with my grandfather.

The year was 1949. My grandfather was fifteen. He was a water distributor during the time of austerity in Israel, right after the War of Independence. He roamed the narrow streets of Jerusalem with a pole over his back with three precious water bottles hanging on each side. The

tall, white Jerusalem stone walls on each side of the street magnified the scorching sun. He walked past worn-out yellow posters that reminded everyone of the scarce food distribution system. Finally, he reached his last house for the day. The sky was filled with shades of red, orange, and pink. The woman that opened the door had a child in her hands. She looked older than her actual age. Her eyes spoke more than her mouth did, and her child smiled. Her other children were behind her, playing around in the living room, making a mess, not knowing of the struggles of life.

When he finally arrived back home, my grandfather was bursting with hunger. His mother cleaned his brothers' dishes while he fixed himself a bowl of soup. The soup was pale and thin. It contained cabbage, potatoes, and celery, no more than that. It was not what a growing teenager needed, but he was grateful for his first bite of the day. At the end of the day, he climbed into the crowded, squeaking bed, trying not to wake his brothers. This was not the life he imagined when his family came from Syria, but that was my grandfather, he knew that by working hard and persisting, he and his family could obtain a better life.

A coat is a coat, that I know. It is meant to keep you warm. My grandfather's coat is so much more than that. For me, it is not merely a piece of cloth you wear at lower temperatures. It is not only warmth I seek from it. Not the protection from the powers of winter. Not from heavy rain, not from blazing sharp hail, and not from glitters of snow. My grandfather's coat is what I have left of him. It is all the things he experienced and wanted me to be safe from. It is about his way of life. About his mistakes but also his accomplishments. It is very much about his love for his family. It is understanding how he raised my mother. It is about growing up with nothing and working hard. It is about not crying about your situation but thinking about how to improve it. It is about not resting on our laurels. It is about *executing*.

That was my grandfather, working day to night as an electrician. He worked all over Israel. My grandma always told me about the times he was fixing a machine in a factory up north, three hours away from home. She would take his calls from factories requesting a repair. Since there weren't wireless phones, he called from the factory when he was finished to check if there was anything else to do that day. Sometimes they would call just five minutes after he left the factory, asking for a repair. My grandma always told me that when he got home, and she would give him the message, he would never complain. He would just pack his things and go straight back. My grandfather had that amazing ability to execute, he knew where he came from and where he wanted to take his family, and that kept him going.

Today was a special day. I woke up in my room in Pittsburgh. The weather was too cold for me, as usual. I pulled up the blinds, which revealed the busy morning traffic. I watered my plant and was going to make breakfast, but before I left my room, I saw the picture. Even though it was hanging on the wall in front of my bed, it was so easy to not pay attention to it amidst my morning routine, which focused on getting things done fast. But for some reason, today, more than any day, it caught my eye. I saw my grandfather in the picture, I saw myself as well. I was young and anxious to learn, while he was mature and experienced. The wrinkles on his face symbolized his wisdom. His glasses shined off the old camera's flash. I was sitting there next to him, my legs weren't long enough to reach the floor. I was so small next to him. His buttoned shirt was tucked into his pants. One of his hands was wrapped around my shoulder and the other rested on his lap. He smiled, I smiled. My smile was spread all over my face, as wide as possible. His smile was subtle, and I wondered what was on his mind.

Today was a special day. Before I went out into the stressful, fast-paced world, I had a chance to stop for a second and really *appreciate* what I have. To take a long breath and remind

myself how lucky I am. Why am I so fortunate while other people were born into suffering? Looking back at the hardships of my grandfather's life, I can't help but wonder why he was born into that situation. Why was he born with such a strong will? I will never have an answer to all my questions. The one thing I learned from my grandfather's experiences, the thing that is most essential for every human being, is that we need to *appreciate* what we have. And that is something people in the world are not doing enough. It's easy to complain to your mother that you don't like the food she has made, but have you ever felt true hunger? Complaining about getting a low grade on your English test is easy. Still, the truth is you probably didn't work hard enough. In contrast, some people don't even get the opportunity to receive an education. That is why I admire my grandfather. That is why I will always work as hard as I can despite having everything I need in life. My grandfather always carried his electrician toolbox, but he bequeathed me tools that are much more valuable.

I was late for class. I shoved my notebooks in my backpack and got my keys. Just as I was about to leave, I stopped at the door. I took my grandfather's coat of the rack and slid into it. I buttoned up its three buttons and looked in the mirror. I realized I'm starting to grow into the coat, I smiled subtly, just like him. More grateful than ever, I left the building and started my day.

Works Cited

Interview with my grandmother, Rina Kattan, 21 November 2022.