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Li Han Ren's Journey

Plop. Plop. Squish. Plop! I wince at my failed attempt to dump out my dinner quietly. No matter how low I placed my bowl into the trash can, the mushrooms, heinous abominations, still make an obnoxiously loud sound. My eyes widen as my Grandpa's head turns around. "What are you doing?" he demands.

I stutter, "I didn't want to eat the mushrooms because I don't like them."

"What?!? I thought the mushrooms tasted amazing! How could you not like the mushrooms?" Grandpa sighs and mutters words too soft for me to hear. I became confused and slightly annoyed at his statement. This was not the only time he downplayed my complaints. To be honest, my Grandpa and I were strangers to each other. Even though he has been living with me for seven years, to me, he is simply a man who is good at repairing and cooking. The main issue is he speaks only Chinese while I only speak English. I could not understand him, and he could not understand my feelings. As the years passed, I grew more distant from Grandpa until I interviewed him with the help of my dad, who was the translator. After my meeting, I was compelled to research China's political and economic conditions during his lifetime. This essay, a combination of history and my Grandpa's life, will ensure I will never forget his self-sacrifices even after he passes into the afterlife. As I heard Grandpa's story, my previous agitation from his comments about food and other remarks about hardship dissipated into sympathy. Our unique

histories shape our present-day characters. I want to share my Grandpa's story of overcoming challenges through perseverance, self-sacrifice, and hard work to support his loved ones.

In 1944, my Grandpa burst into this world amidst the chaos of the end of World War II and the beginning of the Chinese Civil War. In 1949, the Communist Party, under Mao's rule, took over mainland China. Then, in seventh grade, my Grandpa's father died of liver failure. Since Grandpa was the oldest male child with six younger siblings, he was responsible for taking care of them. Every night in the pitch black, Grandpa would sneak outside to learn welding to earn enough to prevent his siblings' bodies from going limp from hunger. After eighth grade, Grandpa dropped out of school to aid the family by working full-time. Times turned for the worse in 1958, right after Grandpa finished middle school when Mao started the Great Leap Forward, which caused massive starvation and resulted in the deaths of 56 million people. While explaining his past, Grandpa's charcoal black eyes turned to stone as he shared dark times. "All of the trees were stripped bare for their bark, which we ate... It took eight yuan [around one USD] for a person to get the bare minimum amount of food to survive until the end of the month." While Grandpa was busy working to make enough money so he and his family could fill their stomachs, my most difficult challenge was preparing for tests. I never had and still do not have to worry about not having food on the table when I arrive home. I am lucky that I have the choice to be picky.

After two years of welding, Grandpa obtained a contract that put him in charge of building a plumbing system on a farm. After finishing the plumbing system, he worked on the farm to earn extra money. Just a few days later, blisters and pus covered his hands. On the farm, Grandpa was treasured because he had a middle school diploma. Many children during this time were deprived of schooling opportunities. After that, Grandpa was elected farm manager.

However, agriculture positions earned significantly less than other jobs, for he only earned around \$11.00 monthly as the leader of the entire farm and the plumbing system. The Cultural Revolution of 1966 only made life harder; the impoverished became even poorer.

Therefore, two years later, Grandpa left the farm to obtain multiple temporary jobs, such as transporting goods. From dusk to dawn, he would repeatedly carry bags of immense weight on his back from boats to marketplaces. By now, blisters and wounds were common occurrences. When Grandpa had free time, he would bike countless miles and spend hours trying to fish so there would be no empty stomachs.

In 1972, the first diplomatic discussion between the US and China occurred when President Nixon visited China, and in 1978, China reformed its economy and normalized trade with other nations. This resulted in financial and technological growth and better wages for workers. In 1980, Grandpa transferred to a bicycle manufacturing company. After several years of harsh labor and determination, my Grandpa climbed the ranks and became the Deputy Factory Director. However, as the years progressed, people changed from being supportive of each other since everyone was poor to becoming greedy for power and money. Grandpa left the company after twenty years because he did not enjoy the hostile relations between his peers. However, he always continued to assist others. He helped people set up businesses such as Kirkin, a Japanese drink company. The opening of China's economic doors resulted in China collaborating more with other countries.

Grandpa and Grandma moved to the US in 2001, but they did not settle in the US. Grandpa moved back and forth between the US and China to support people creating their own companies. My grandpa played an essential role in the expansion of China's economy.

Even though Grandpa's highest education degree was from middle school, he still rose to the highest ranks through dedication and resilience. After hearing Grandpa's story, I couldn't help but feel thankful. After all, none of my issues compare to any of his situations of poverty and starvation. Grandpa chose to surrender his education and health to support future generations. My Grandpa ingrained these principles of hard work into my father, who influenced me to pursue my studies in biology and English. I plan to model these morals for my future children. Because my grandfather prioritized family, my dad and I have been fortunate to experience a comfortable life. Even after all of Grandpa's struggles, he continues to live every day with a smile.

As time passes and life becomes easier, people tend to become insensitive towards their ancestors since there are no common problems to bind them together. Language barriers can especially cause cracks in relationships, which can cause us to become impatient or confused. However, sharing our backstories, struggles, and emotions can create a bond that passes the test of time. After all, the person who lives with me, who has gray hair and dark eyes, is not only a man who likes bicycles and exercising. This person has gone through countless challenges and given us the gift of resiliency. I am thankful that I call this person "Grandpa."

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