

I could not smell anything. There was light, but nothing else. The scent, similar to a mechanic's workshop, that I longed for was not there. My dad and I hung our heads as we realized that his father's 80-year-old train, the Commodore Vanderbilt, had finally stopped working. Even though my grandpa died almost 12 years ago, it felt as though he died all over again.

For as long as I can remember, my dad and I have set up my grandpa's train set. A big green fabric acted as the grass of the little town that took up only eight square feet. Ten buildings, seven people, two train engines, and 15 train cars. These plastic houses and metal trains may seem worthless to the average person, but they held three generations of love. One generation I never had the honor of meeting.

I often think about what I have heard about my grandpa. He was average height, had glasses, a huge bald spot on the top of his head, and a sense of humor that was inherited by his children and grandchildren. Unfortunately, he passed away in February 2001, long before my parents met. Although I have heard many stories about him, my relationship with him was not the same as a typical grandparent and grandchild. He never read me stories, he never walked me to the bus stop, and he never sang me happy birthday. Every December, however, our relationship would grow into something more. Once every guest left our house on Thanksgiving, my dad and I would retreat to the basement and grab the two boxes of train materials that held his childhood and my connection with my grandpa.

It was the same every year. We set everything up on Thanksgiving day, and built the track and houses, before carefully taking the Vanderbilt out of its box. It was slightly larger than my hand, but my fingers gripped its cool metal like there was no tomorrow. My dad aligned the wheels to

the track and gave me a nod, telling me to turn the dial of the electrical box. Life filled the engine once again, but not the way we hoped for. There was no smell, nor sound produced, only the light bulb turned on. Although the well-loved train had trouble running in the years past, it still ran. Yet with every adjustment of the electrical box's dial, there was nothing.

"I guess that is it," Dad said as his shoulders slumped. He was never an emotional person, yet I could see the disappointment that hung in the air surrounding him. I looked at him then back at my grandpa's legacy, staring at it for a moment before an idea came to my mind.

"With your permission," I turned to him. "I can remove the engine and see if I can do anything." I did not want to interfere with my dad and grandpa's bond, but the future engineer in me also wished to fix this more than anything. *This train is what we have left of grandpa, I thought to myself. I will not let it end like this. It cannot end like this.*

I was expecting to get shot down, but after a minute or two, he told me to try it. After all, the train no longer worked. There was no way I could have made it worse. With new resolve; I took the train into the kitchen and set it on the table before going out and getting a screwdriver from the garage. For ten minutes, I sat there with the train's engine in my hand, cleaning gunk from what I thought to be key conductivity points and inspecting the rest of the train. After black crud had covered three Q-Tips, I screwed the train back together. This was my chance to prove to my parents, and myself, that studying engineering in college next year is the correct path for me. *If those five engineering classes are going to come in handy, now would be the time.*

Walking back to the tiny town; I rested the train down and aligned it with the tracks. I took a breath to steel myself as my arm extended toward the dial. My eyes stayed glued to the

train, glancing over to the box only once to see how much electricity I was giving the tracks.

*Click, click, click, click*, rang the train. I gently slammed the dial back down, a glimmer visible in my eyes as I grinned ear to ear.

“Dad, I got it,” I shouted, feet pounding against the floor as I ran into the other room where my parents were. My dad turned his attention to me as I repeated the same phrase I said seconds ago. I turned around to run back to the project I had been working on, not checking to see if my family was following me. Carpet slightly burned my knees as I slid to the electrical box that provided the tracks with the goods to get any train going. While the train circled the town and its homey smell filled the room, I looked up at my dad. He stood behind me with a red face and teary eyes. I stood up to meet his gaze, then gestured to the now-working machine like it was a trophy on display.

“If I needed any proof that engineering was for you, this was it,” he laughed slightly before pausing for a moment. “Your grandpa would be so proud of you,” he said as he wrapped me in a hug. I knew there was more he wanted to say, but we needed no words to describe how proud he was of me.

*This is our connection to him, I thought. Like hell I was going to let this train stop working.*