



Chapter Three

Grandpa's Story

My mother sat there and spun a yarn that had me completely captivated. How was she able to tell me a story of her youth - change tenses and tell me in real-time, the story as told to her by her mother, my grandma, Maria.

As I sat on the top deck of the ferry, I must admit I was mesmerized. I could hear the water thrashing around the huge propellers just over the stern. As I looked up, I was disappointed. Why? Because land was coming closer and closer – I think we were more than half-way there.

I didn't want my mother to know I had been daydreaming so I rejoined her somewhere in the middle of the story her mother was telling her as she brushed her hair while whining about not being able to date some dude she had a schoolgirl crush on.

I think she looked at me and I know she knew that my mind was off somewhere but she just stretched her words with exaggerated effort, the cadence of which, snapped me back into her story as if my brain were attached to a rubber band.

“... I didn't really want to hear what my mother was telling me about your grandpa Oliver, but like you now, I felt compelled to listen and listen I did. At first, all I could think about was having Maria to continue brushing my hair - it felt *soooooo* good. I was still angry that I couldn't go out with Daniel for a simple date and a movie. My dad didn't trust anyone. I didn't blame nor care if he trusted anyone else. I was only concerned that he respect the fact that I had worked hard to earn his trust... that is until I heard his story via Grandma Maria.”

She looked up at me and said, “am I boring you Oliver, do you really want to hear this or...”

I snapped back instantly, “you bet! Come-on, don’t keep me in suspense. What was the big secret that made Grandpa turn sour on everybody and where is Grandpa today?”

“By now Oliver”, she began while cautiously looking around, “my mother and I were sitting there facing each other. She got up and walked to their bedroom. When she returned, she whispered, “good, he’s asleep. Let’s go down to the kitchen, I’ll make tea and we’ll finish the story there.”

“I sat at the kitchen while my mother filled the kettle, and primped over a stainless steel tea-ball as she made two cups of her famous red-zinger tea. I watched as she lovingly drizzled a hoard of golden honey into the steaming cups. That first sip was the best.

She got up from the table and walked toward the den, “Gloria, let the tea steep a minute or two, I’ll be right back.”

She walked away and returned with a large, about twenty-inches square blue chipboard photo album. She sat it on the table and began turning pages. As she turned the Bristol white pages made of a thick construction paper, I saw photographs large and small held in place tiny triangles on the four corners of the photos. The triangles were glued to the pages and the photos were inserted into the pockets of the glued-on triangles. I had never seen anything this old; after all, my photo albums at the time were like loose-leaf binders with plastic pages to insert my photos. Momma carefully and lovingly flipped page after page and then, just as she flipped to the sixth or seventh page, she stopped, sipped her tea and continued her story.

“Who are these people”, I asked?

“That’s a photo of your father at seventeen with Father Frank DiNovi, Father Carl Brandies, and Sister Mary Patricia. These three people changed the course of my Dad’s life... forever.

‘As a young girl, I looked up at her frowning. She caught my interrogatory and continued in her usual candor and grace.

‘Gloria, your father is a devout man, a man who loves, loved, use-to-love God. After what happened to him, his doubt in God left him a shell of his old self but even so, that shell was still a good man, but a man with little to no faith.’

I don’t know why but I carelessly sat my teacup on the lower corner of the photo. Mom quickly moved it but it was too late. The hot cup’s bottom had left a circular stain on the photo. I could see that Mom was about to tear up and seeing her momentary hurt, I actually did cry. As she saw my remorse,

she stiffened her lip and said, ‘oh, it’s nothing dear. I think I have another copy or two. Don’t worry about it.’

“She was being generous and I both knew and appreciated it. I felt horrible.”

She continued as she patted at the stain with a dishtowel. ‘As a young boy himself, he began to notice that he possessed the power to do seemingly impossible things that even he didn’t understand. He said he used to have visions and he all-but-swears that he’s heard the voice of God directly.

‘He also possessed what was then considered a handicap - he was a southpaw.’

‘What’s a southpaw,’ I asked my mother?

‘A southpaw is a person who writes with their left hand - called so, because the left hand while writing, appears to be pointing down, or south as the person writes. Grandpa was a top student at the prestigious Von LeBrauham Catholic School. When he had told his teachers at Von LeBrauham, various nuns and priest, of his ability to communicate with God. Most laughed, most chuckled, most were amused because he was such a dynamic young man and absolutely no one, not one person, took him seriously, that is until the arrival of Sister Mary Patricia and Father Carl Brandies. That was the year that my Dad’s life turned to hell-on-earth.

‘Sister Pat taught seventh grade English and Religious Ethics, while Father Brandies taught Algebra and Physics. Together, they brought a level of terror to both the student body and the existing faculty that had never been seen before. Everyone, including the principal was afraid of them. After all, they were appointed directly from the Archdiocese bypassing the approval of the Order who had started and carefully stocked the school with the best instructors they could find.

‘Father Damien Von LeBrauham came from the Netherlands with a burning desire to teach. His mantra was excellence and since the school’s beginnings, he personally interviewed every teacher, counselor, cook, and even the janitors – to insure they loved and believed in his mission. His first crop was so brilliant that all the Ivy Leagues schools of the late 30’s had a silent waiting list for Von LeBrauham graduates. And he was proved right. His alumni graduated tops in their respective colleges and went on to become the *crème-dela-crème*. Each successive graduating class had a tradition of donating incredible sums of money to the school to insure its mission remained in tact. That legacy continued until Father Von LeBrauham died just after Hiroshima

Father Damien travel to Japan to offer aide and counsel to the Hiroshim survivors; he died soon thereafter of what we know now as radiation poisoning. The local Archdiocese took over before Damien could appoint a successor. It was the next generation of the Archdiocese who never knew of the Von LeBrauham's mission statement and released the likes of Sister Pat and Father Brandies on the students at Von LeBrauham.

'Anyway, my Dad did something pretty incredible, even by today's standards. One day Sister Pat was humiliating Dad's best friend in front of the whole class. "Mr. Duncan, you have no idea how to conjugate a simple verb. My God! Who's been teaching you English before me or are you just that stupid..." 'Sister Pat went on and on and on until poor young Mr. Duncan was reduced to tears right there in front of the class.

'As he began to cry, Sister Pat extracted a large paddle and whacked Mr. Duncan across the face so hard that he immediately whelped up. As she raised the paddle to strike him again, Grandpa Gus stood up and issued a command in a voice and sternness that no one had ever heard. He said, "In the name of Jesus I rebuke the spirit I sense within you and command in my faith in God that that paddle be broken!"

'The whole class was in shock. Grandpa stood where he was and approached the front waving his left hand in some strange motion and the paddle simply snapped in two. Sister Pat dropped the paddle in absolute horror. Grandpa approached his buddy Josh Duncan and put his arm around him compassionately. As he did so, he snarled at Sister Pat and she actually recoiled. Escorting Josh back to his seat, he mumbled to Sister Pat, "I'm going to pray that you actually understand the heart of God you profess to represent."

'Sister Patricia gathered her black habit about her and ran from the classroom. And even though the classroom was completely free of a leader, no one said a word. Someone went up to the front of the classroom and picked up the broken paddle. "How'd you do that Gus", someone shouted? 'Gus said nothing when suddenly, the door burst open and a mountain of a man stood there with eyes peering out from his erect body like a lighthouse - a lighthouse whose million candlepower beam had just settled on Gusweto Sanchez. This was the much feared and ominous Father Carl Brandies.

'Approaching Dad, he grabbed him by his collar and dragged him to the front of the class. "So you're the one practicing witchcraft are you?" 'Father Carl, in a single motion stripped off his exquisitely beautiful red sash and gagged my father so swiftly that he could scarcely believe it. And with the

other end of the long sash he bound my father's wrist almost hog-tying him as he shoved him to the center of the class.

'He shouted to the class, "this is what happens when you allow the devil to use you. I've seen this before and the only way to cure this is to force a left handed devil worshiper to use his right hand. Children', he boomed, 'the devil cannot long remain in a right handed person – I think God is right-handed...' he said as he looked momentarily away and skyward, "...so to cure this young boy, to force Satan out of him, we will force him to use his right hand."

I sat on the deck of the ferry. I was now angry. I was in awe. I felt this horrible sense of rage and outrage. I wanted to kill someone. My face flushed with seething hatred, my mother stopped. "Oliver dear, you okay?"

I mumbled something but my eyes said it all. I wanted to go back in time and break Father Brandies face. My mother calmed me down. "Oliver, that's not even the worst of it."

"You mean there's more?" I look at the shore rapidly approaching and suddenly wanted this trip to be longer. My mother continued her story.

"And with that Oliver, my sweet, Father Carl Brandies and Sister Mary Patricia proceeded to torture my Dad, your Grandpa, in a way that even now, I can scarcely imagine. I remember my mother telling me the rest of the story as she tucked me in bed that night. After hearing her story of my Dad's story, going on a date with Daniel didn't seem so important anymore. I wanted to run down the hall screaming, 'Daddy, I love you' but I knew I couldn't.

'Gloria, as Father Brandies held your gagged and bound father down, Sis Pat extracted a thick maple ruler from her desk. As she crashed the hard wood on your father's knuckles, he winced in unbearable pain. Time seemed to pass ever so slowly as she continued to pound his hands. Suddenly, the flesh blistered into something resembling raw hamburger. The class was dead silent when they heard the intermittent drip - drip - drip of blood spewing from your Dad's left hand.

'Broken and shattered, the bones were twisted and useless.

'Still gagged, he was dragged in agony, to the infirmary only to emerge ten minutes later with his hand wrapped in thick white gauze leaving his left hand, his writing hand, completely useless.

' Father Brandies forcefully escorted Dad to the front of the class interrupting Sister Patricia right in the middle of her lesson on participles – dangling or other. His voice boomed in the now renowned tenor that the students had come to both fear and resent.

“This young man has something he’d like to say to you Sister Patricia...” he said directing his angry glare to your father, “and it better be a proper apology.”

‘Just then, the school’s principal, Father DiNovi came bursting into the room and demanded in an angry snarl, “What’s going on in here? The nurse just told me that some...”

Father Brandies interrupted the principal. “I’m in charge here, of this situation. My authority comes from the Archdiocese who’s tired of you coddling these so-called students. Sister Pat and I were sent here to give this school what it’s always needed – discipline. Now sit down and pay attention.”

‘For some reason no one could explain, the school’s very excellent principal, Father Frank DiNovi, recoiled both in shock and obedience. The class was mesmerized watching the power play acted out between the two men who held the most power and authority. No one could believe it because Father DiNovi had the children’s respect while Father Brandies owned their fear.

‘Dad’s eyes Gloria, searched the faces of everyone there. Just as quickly, he turned his eyes skyward and all anyone saw was the whites of his eyes. When he looked back to Father Brandies and the others present, his eyes were ablaze, almost orange but yet strangely peaceful. Dad’s countenance changed and even Father Brandies’ face contorted to an expression that was somewhere just above grave concern and just below open panic or stark fear. Everyone saw it. Brandies showed real fear for the first time. Sister Pat began to run toward the door but Dad’s voice, or the voice that came through Dad, stopped her.

“I command you in the name of God and his son Jesus, to stop where you are!”

‘Gloria, no one moved a muscle. It was as if Sister Patricia was suddenly paralyzed. Slowly she turned to face Dad, your grandfather, in obedience and awe. Father Brandies released his grip on Dad as if he were silently trying to undo what was already too late to be undone.

‘Dad removed the gauze from his hand slowly un-twirling it as carefully as if he were reverse curling the same gauze on an Egyptian mummy. As each layer trailed toward the floor, each successive layer revealed light pink – to pink – to light red – to blood drenched – to finally expose what made all gasp at the sight of – a bloody paw that resembled more road-kill than a child’s hand.

‘Father DiNovi burst into spontaneous tears at the sight. He shouted in horror, “dear God in Heaven, Brandies, what have you done?”’

‘As Dad looked around, he noticed that even the toughest of his classmates were in tears. Sharon Keggles had a crush on Dad and left her seat, approached Dad without caution, hugged him laying her head on his shoulder in some solemn show of support. Father Brandies looked about puzzled and trying with his every effort, to hold on to the bravado that had made him feared in the first place.’

“Sometimes,” Father Brandies said with feigned remorse, “...in our fight with satan, we must take drastic steps. The Scriptures show us of many instances when God directed his servants to be what appeared to human eyes, as inhuman but in fact, were sanctioned and ordered by God Himself. This”, he said pointing to Dad, “is just one of those situations.”

‘Dad held his bloody left hand high in the air so that no one could miss the sight. A stream of blood mixed with some whitish-pink antiseptic oozed down his hand, past his wrist, streamed slowly toward his elbow to finally drip in intermittent *splips* to the tiled floor. Then your Dad spoke to God: “Father in heaven”, he began reverently, humbly, and as if no one else was in the room, “in the promise of your faith, I say to this hand, my hand, to be used in service to you, be healed here, now, in this moment.”’

‘Dad doubled over in nausea, but he kept his hand held high for all to see. Suddenly a blond-ish, honey-colored light shone through the window and bathed his hand. Writhing in pain, he stood there trembling as his hand rebuilt itself. All watched in amazement as the tendons, ligaments and smashed bones solidified and reshaped into the pinkish caricature of a hand. In the next moment, several classmates fainted. Sister Patricia screamed but still could not move. Father Brandies acted as if he were held by an invisible grip as he watched this hand metamorphose right before him.

‘As the minutes passed, all but the ring finger of the left hand was miraculously repaired and looked as if nothing had ever occurred. Then Dad spoke: “yes Lord, I thank you and I will tell them, I will tell them and them... all”’.

‘Dad, my father that is, Gus, said that last “*all*” with a degree of finality that instantly made Brandies and Patricia freeze. They looked at each other and immediately tried to exit the room using managerial brio to overcome the power of the moment.

‘But before they could flee, Dad silenced them with just a look and turned to them all, he rose from his crouching pain to stand erect before them.