

The Head of the Table

Daniel Caillouet

Course: English 101

Instructor: Ms. Ashley Williams

Essay Type: Personal Narrative

Even though we were on our way to the hospital, it never occurred to me that the man who sat at the head of his huge antique table every Sunday may not sit there again. The ride seemed to take forever, though it was only a few miles away. My mom did her best to explain what was wrong with him as we drove along, but because I was fourteen it was hard for me to understand. Shortly after we arrived, he passed away. There were complications while he was being treated for a broken hip. We weren't left empty-handed, though; he left eighty-seven years of memories and inspiration to pass on.

It seemed as if the whole town knew him. He had made his own reputation. People knew him as a loving father, a good friend, and a great hunter. All of us called him something different. Some called him Daddy, his wife playfully called him "Buster-Brown," his friends called him Eddie, but to my family and me he was simply "Pawpaw."

He was a strong man, with broad shoulders, his back bent slightly from years of working in his fields, and his hands seemed to engulf mine every time he greeted me at his front door. He had a bad knee from a farming accident, but when it was time for us to go he would always get out of his chair and walk us to the door. He would shake your hand, give you a hug and in a deep, rugged voice say, "Ya'll come back." When he spoke, it echoed through the house. He made sure you knew that he wanted you to come back to visit soon.

He was the most feared, yet the sweetest man I had ever known. No one would dare touch Pawpaw's things, especially his chair. His chair seemed as old and worn as he was. It was

dark green with a reclining back. The seat had a few broken springs and had a permanent impression from where he sat, but it was his and that was how he liked it. He never wanted to fix or replace it. He just thought of it as broken in.

He used to drive a bus for the local school, and each week he would buy a pack of gum for the best-behaved child on his bus. Even after he retired, he kept buying it. His room always had the scent of Wrigley's Double Mint Gum. I don't think he chewed much of it, but he always kept it on his dresser for times when we were brave enough to ask him for a piece.

I remember my mom explaining that he was going to be okay now because he was going to heaven. She said that's where all the good people go after they pass on. His funeral didn't seem real. It couldn't be real; he had to be alive. I wanted to go to his house and see him standing at his front door, waiting for me. But he wasn't there. His voice no longer echoed through the house. His chair was empty, his slippers sat alone, and his dog lay in the empty rocker on the porch. He really was gone.

Slowly, I began to realize that the one I had always known as my great-grandfather, the big, strong, head of the family, was no longer with us. I suddenly became aware that I had so many questions to ask and now he would never be able to answer them. He would never speak of being in the C.C.C.; we wouldn't hear any of his advice on farming or stories of how he and my grandfather would go fishing in his younger years. We wouldn't eat anymore of Pawpaw's homegrown vegetables. Most of all, he would no longer sit at the head of the table.

Daniel Caillouet is a Computer Science major.

Ms. Williams' Comments: *Daniel's essay is an incredibly moving story full of details that make his memories of his great-grandfather come alive. he is a talented writer whose creative essays and insightful writing advice were an inspiration and model for his fellow students.*