All I Know About Grandfather

by Matt Rowan

There were days in my youth when, through no fault of their own, my parents could not drive me the seven mile trip to my elementary school. When I got older they bought me a bike and that proved duly adequate as conveyance. But when I was six years in age and slow to ride without training wheels, alternative transportation had got to be found.

Fortunately my grandfather, a war veteran and, my parents thought, a smarmy codger (which I would soon find in my own primitive way to be too generous a label) was available. The plan was he'd give me rides to and from school. He was always ready to prove his proficiency behind the wheel, of which I can attest he possessed little.

The day he was to drive me to school for the first time he came late, a half hour late to be precise. Neither my mother nor father took it as a portent of what was to come, though they should have. My mother hastily ushered me out of our house at the honk of my grandfather's horn.

As I neared where he'd parked, he opened the passenger side door of his 1976 steel-gray Cadillac Seville, in certain disrepair, and with a warm though conspicuously disquieting grin, he extended his hand to help me inside.

Once I was seated, he fired up the engine and reversed into the street -- without checking his mirrors or even glancing behind him. Off we went.

For the first several seconds there was no more than an eerie impenetrable silence between us. Then Grandfather spoke. “I hope you don't mind, Billy, Billy, Billy-Goat, that I smell a little weird this morning. I didn't have time to shower after all the . . .”

He stopped. The car again filled with silence.

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“After all the what, Grandpa?” I asked, against my better judgment, even then.

“The unpleasantness of the night before. Have you ever heard of Hells Angels, Billy? No, of course you haven't; I hadn't either, until last night of course . . . when I shot five of them with a sawed off shotgun supplied to me by my employers.” It was then that I noticed the left side of his face was, in fact, awash in dried blood.

“Uh, Grandpa, you get hurt?” I managed to say.

“Oh no, Billy, obviously this isn't my blood. Hells Angels, it's Hells Angels blood, damn'em.” My grandfather looked down for a moment, unwisely because he almost careened into garbage truck, which had stopped in the middle of the street. He looked up in time and swerved to miss it, crashing us into a nearby parked car. I had misestimated the durability of the Cadillac because it shredded through the parked car rather easily, with little noticeable exterior damage to itself, I would later discover (this one of the odd things I manage to recall).

Grandfather was a mess, pouring and swigging shot after shot of whiskey from a coffee mug. He sobbed about the loss of some mysterious friend during his “hit” the night before, and how the cops came and some of them died, too -- how he now wished to be dead like his buddy.

“I'm no good for you, Billy-Goat [my name is Jeff]. I'm no good to anyone anymore.” He pulled out his revolver to finish what hadn't been finished already, apparently. But before he could pull the trigger, five thugs emerged from the rear of the stopped garbage truck. They were armed with various guns and angry grimaces. They were vengeful Hells Angels looking to even the score.

I about fainted, but grandfather slapped me back into consciousness and gave me his revolver. He pulled a machine gun from under his seat, and forced himself out the driver's side window. After landing hard on the pavement, he lept back upright, with surprising fleetness of foot, and started firing indiscriminately at the hostile men. He dropped three of the Hells Angels before they knew

what had happened and hit another as he tried to take cover behind the garbage truck's cab.

Knowing he needed reinforcements, the lone survivor ran for his life, ‘like a scared little doe bitch' -- my grandfather's words.

My grandfather, again to my surprise, pursued him in a rage and tackled him to the ground. Not wanting to be left with the corpses and fearing for my grandfather, I left the Cadillac and followed behind with the revolver, which in my frail, six-year-old arms felt like it weighed two tons, or more, even.

Grandfather was hovering over the prostrated Hells Angel when I finally caught up. “Well, Billy, Bill, Bilroo, you'd better finish him. It's no use. He's no good to us alive.”

“What?” I said.

“Ah hell, I'll do it then!” Grandfather ripped the revolver away from me and fired five shots in the Hells Angel's back. Not surprisingly, it was about then that the police arrived and Grandfather appeared resigned to his arrest. He dropped the weapon immediately and put up his hands.

“It's not live ammo,” Grandfather said, in earnest appeal. “I was just trying to teach my little grandson here a life lesson, that's all. See, hey Charley,” he called to the dead Hells Angel whom he'd shot five times. “Hey Charley Horse, get up, you schmuck, and show the cops it was all an act.” Charley remained unresponsive.

Grandfather, I later found out, had set the whole thing up -- his Hells Angel story, the parked garbage truck, his portraying himself as a Charles Bronson-style vigilante / hit man (which never seemed as necessary to me as it must have to him).

The Hells Angels were all paid actors, except “Charley,” who was a friend of Grandfather's from the VFW Hall. Charley really was dead, though. Grandfather had forgotten to reload his revolver with blanks.

The lesson Grandfather contended he was attempting to teach me was that I should never get involved in any dealings with, even heroic dealings against, the Hells Angels. He decided that this was

an important lesson to teach after watching a documentary about the Hells Angels on Court TV.

The jury didn't see it that way. He may have avoided such a severe sentence if he had seemed for a moment contrite about what he'd done, but even at the trial he never seemed to feel too bad about killing his friend.

They gave him the chair.