

## Living without looking down

My heart raced as Ethan inched towards the precipice. Crouching as he positioned the camera and tripod at the edge of the canyon, he prepared for the shot. Noah, less comfortable with heights than his brother, remained a few yards back, leaning against a stubby tree growing from the rocky soil. I wanted to grab an arm, a belt loop, anything to keep Ethan safe. But I was frozen on the spot; other than repeatedly suggesting that perhaps he had ventured out far enough, I could do nothing. My son insisted he was fine; after all, he was at least two feet from the edge. He had to be there to capture the shot he wanted. And he was right, of course: the result was spectacular. I resumed breathing once he rejoined us on the trail.

It would not be unreasonable to ask what a person with a healthy fear of heights was doing hiking along the Grand Canyon's South Rim. For several hours on that mild, windy day in March I asked myself that very question, and I struggled to provide a rational answer. Of course I knew there wasn't one. My sons and I included a day trip to the Grand Canyon near the end of our Arizona holiday, and despite all of the research we compiled on the Canyon leading up to our vacation, as we drove through the gates of Grand Canyon National Park and saw it for the first time, I was totally unprepared for the overwhelming size of it. I really had no idea what I had gotten myself into. At 227 miles long and 18 miles wide, it could easily swallow up a city the size of Toronto or Chicago. But it was its depth – one mile down to the Colorado River far below – that took my breath away (hyperventilating will do that). One mile: that's three CN Towers stacked one on top of the other. Despite the feelings of sheer terror that gripped me each time the trail took us perilously close to the edge (there are no barriers to keep us from a misstep that would surely be our last), I was nevertheless drawn to the canyon's immense natural beauty. I had wanted to see the Grand Canyon my entire adult life, and I was determined not to let my fear cheat me out of an opportunity that might not come again. And so there I was, progressing haltingly along the trail, the push-pull of dread and awe competing with each step.

Our Arizona holiday was the first time just the three of us had gone away together. We all agreed that we needed to go somewhere warm to escape the numbingly cold winter, and Arizona certainly fit the bill, but beyond that the common threads of discussion began to fray. Noah, nearly sixteen at the time, wanted a relaxing "by the pool" vacation. By contrast, Ethan, Noah's elder by five years, was lobbying hard for an active holiday. I found myself wanting some of both, and after some negotiation we settled on Sedona, which afforded us hiking opportunities in the Red Rock Mountains in the morning and plenty of time to lounge by the pool in the afternoon. I was a bit concerned about hiking some of the higher elevations, in part because of the rigours of the climb (I wondered whether I could keep up with my sons), but mainly because at some point I would have to descend the mountain, and coming down has always proven far more problematic for me than going up.

After settling in at the hotel on the first day, we chose a hike the next morning that meandered through a local canyon. Unfortunately, it had

snowed heavily in the mountains a week earlier and the runoff had caused the normally placid creek at the base of the canyon to swell dangerously, making it all but impossible to navigate. And since the trail crossed the creek no less than seventeen times, I decided – to the boys' extreme disappointment – that we had to turn back soon after we began.

Our day-hiking forays took a decided turn for the better the next day, and in the days after that. We encountered challenging climbs without obstacles and both Ethan and Noah scrambled up to the summits of each mountain like the rambunctious young bucks that they were. My ascents were more steady and cautious, always making sure never to look behind me as I climbed. As they scampered to the top to take pictures, I usually found a safe place near the summit to sit and wait and enjoy my modest accomplishments. I managed each descent without mishap, breaking the trip back down into manageable chunks, casting my eyes only as far as the next plateau and never further. Although I could never hope to experience the boys' unfettered joy on the mountain, I was happy to have found a way to be present enough to share in their happiness.

\* \* \*

As we reached the end of the six hour hike along the Grand Canyon's south rim, I knew there was no rational answer to an irrational fear. I could reason all day long that we were never in any serious danger, but it would not stop me from believing that we were. Fear can keep us safe, but it can also keep us from truly living. It's the middle ground that I need to find, that next plateau just a few steps ahead. I believe I came a bit closer to finding it on our trip to Arizona.

**David**

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# possibilities

unleash your imagination

## Grandpa

When I was a young boy one of my favourite places to be was at Grandpa Robson's. He lived only a half a mile away, but for me, it was a completely different world.

Howard Alvin Robson was born in Crown Hill, Ontario, in 1890 – another century altogether. I found it hard to believe that Grandpa was born to a world without cars, and televisions. But I loved the idea that I could always easily figure out his age by simply adding 10 to the current year. So in 1965, when I was 8, my Grandpa was already 75.

Grandpa's garage, where we spent a lot of our time, was a treasure trove of amazing things. His mint condition 57 Chevy for one thing – something he was terribly proud of - along with parts of this and that, railroad spikes, tools that appeared to be handmade, old pieces of wood, a push mower that needed no motor, and old tobacco cans randomly filled with nails, screws and assorted items of unknown use. Plus, this was where Grandpa worked, either sharpening saws at his workbench, or cutting hair while people sat in the big authentic barbershop chair that was stationed in the corner of the garage.

I loved the barbershop chair. To an 8-year old boy, it was like a ride at the fair. The fair however only came through town once per year - I could get on this thing every day. It went up and down, reclined and spun around – sometimes too fast for one prone to motion sickness. I can still feel myself gyrating in this chair to the repetitive grinding sound of grandpa sharpening a saw.

On the other side of the yard, across a vast vegetable garden,

(which we would spend a little time in, picking weeds or harvesting whatever was in season) were two smaller buildings. A storage shed (which we only entered when Grandpa was "looking for something," which apparently meant something even older than the stuff in his garage), and a two-person outhouse, which we would make use of at least once or twice a day. These visits could not be made without a little chuckle, because, let's face it, sitting in an outhouse doing your business with your grandpa sitting on the hole beside you is pretty funny stuff.

Attached to my Grandpa's house and forming part of the back entrance was a coal bin. I don't think I ever appreciated the importance of the coal in that bin, but I did learn (the hard way) how very messy coal could be if one say, decided to climb in and check it out.

His kitchen, like the rest of the house, was tiny, with a small sink, very small fridge, a few cupboards, and a small table and chairs with shiny chrome edges and legs, and a pale weather-beaten surface. Dining at Grandpa's was, well, different. He shaved the mould off the cheese to cut us a slice. We ate sardines right out of a tin – something I had never seen anywhere else, and have never done since. His favourite parts of a chicken



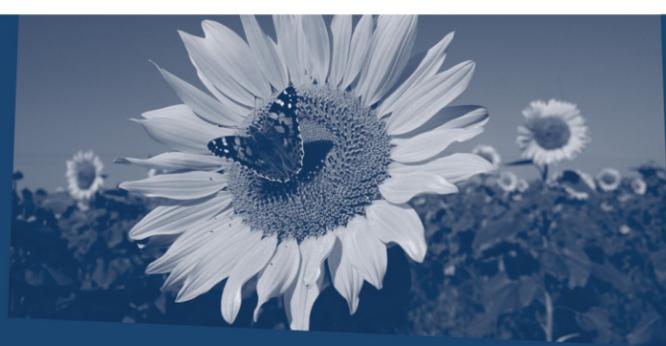
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## Grandpa (cont'd)

were the “giblets.” We might have a cold boiled egg, or a sandwich, maybe just some Saltine crackers, usually things that required minimal effort and could be made with whatever was readily available; items from the fridge, from the walk-in pantry, or out of the garden. I didn’t mind that we never actually cooked anything. I liked that Grandpa assumed that I would eat whatever he was eating.

We often sat at the kitchen table for hours. Grandpa would smoke his pipe, and listen to the radio. He would turn it up when the horse races were announced and we would listen with anticipation to see if our picks from the daily newspaper would win. The sound of the familiar trumpet solo to begin a race still reminds me of my Grandpa to this day.

Sometime late in the afternoon we would walk up-town to Ritchie’s Pharmacy. There my Grandpa would let me buy two things: one drink (I always chose a bottle of Coke) and one candy (I usually chose an Aero bar). After Grandpa finished his business there (probably buying a newspaper, but frankly I didn’t care), and we had a little conversation with Mr. Ritchie, we headed back down Simcoe Street. I would put both the bottle of Coke and the chocolate bar into the fridge, and despite whatever else we might be doing for the next few hours – like eating dinner - I did little else but think of my sweet treasure sitting in the fridge waiting for it to be “time.”

The right time was in the early evening. We usually (but not always) would turn on the television to see if there was something worth watching, like Rawhide or Bonanza. Grandpa loved westerns, which I assumed was because it reminded him of his youth. But whether we were watching the old black and white television, or just sitting waiting for the cuckoo bird to make it’s next appearance out of the clock that tick-tocked away the disappearing moments, grandpa would puff away on his pipe, and I would enjoy the sugar rush from my much anticipated snack.

Grandpa Robson never took me fishing, came to my hockey games, or to see me at school. He did usually come to the house for Sunday dinner, but otherwise, my memories of him are very attached to his place on Simcoe Street. It wasn’t that grandpa fussed over me that made me like him so much. In fact it was

precisely because he didn’t. He just went about living his simple peaceful life, and seemed very happy to have me with him to do just that, allowing me to explore the nooks and crannies of this fascinating world that was so entirely different to my own.

Gradually Grandpa grew too old to remain alone in his house over -night, and he moved into a room with my Uncle Budd and Aunt Helen – interestingly just a few hundred yards further down Simcoe Street. He kept his little world though, and would spend the days there, tinkering in his garage, poking around the garden and smoking his pipe. Although I rarely spent time at his home any more, I remained an occasional visitor to my Aunt and Uncle’s house – eventually only when they were out for the evening. One night, when I was about 16, Grandpa chuckled a little and said, “I’m not sure anymore if I’m looking after you, or if you are looking after me.” I had anticipated this question for some time and quickly replied, “I think it’s neither Grandpa. It’s just you and me spending time together, as always.”

Howard Robson died on November 11, 1976. He was 86. I was 19.

It wasn’t until many years later that I began to ask serious questions about my Grandfather’s life – not his life as I knew it, but his life as a young man and a father raising a family. He had never spoken about this, and of course I eventually grew curious. His world continued to fascinate me, and my exploration of its nooks and crannies was far from complete.

There are many great stories about Grandpa’s life; some of them surprising. He broke his leg when he was 13 and spent an entire year in bed with a weight on his leg to fix it. Arthritis in that leg would plague him for life. He raised a young family during the great depression, and he worked at whatever he could to make money – mostly on the railroad. The story goes that the train would just slow down as they passed through Bradford to let him jump off at the end of the shift. He did odd jobs for neighbours – in particular a couple of sisters who according to my Mom seemed to be thinking of things for him to do so that they could pay him. My Grandmother also diligently did laundry for them – and when the sisters passed away, they left their house to my grandparents, who otherwise would have never owned a home. Grandpa’s first wife died at the age of 21 from a kidney infection.

## Grandpa (cont'd)

She was pregnant at the time, and my grandpa developed a lifelong dislike for hospitals from this trauma. His second wife, Evelyn, my Grandmother, was the mother of all of his 5 children. She passed away at age 61 when I was only 5.

My grandfather endured many things that to me would seem impossible to overcome. And yet, I never knew Grandpa to be bitter, unhappy, resentful or afraid. In my memories he is quite the opposite. He is cheerful and smiling. Always ready for a chuckle and a good joke. At peace. And delighted to just be with me, his grandson.

On Friday August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014 at 11:17 pm, I became a grandfather. Rowan Douglas Earle was born to our daughter Leah and her husband Jon. The third great-grandchild to my Mom, Phyllis Bell (nee Robson), and a great-great-grandson to the late Howard Alvin Robson.

The story of my Grandpa Robson’s life has been somewhat like a puzzle to me. Over the years, as I have learned more about him,

the picture of a remarkable man has become increasingly clear. But, a piece of that puzzle was missing; the piece that definitively explains the twinkle in his eye when we were together. The piece I found the moment my own grandson, Rowan, was in my arms.

*Bill*  
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## Welcome!

## Welcome baby Austin and baby Rowan!



We are pleased to announce the birth of Austin Michael Bondi, born June 23<sup>rd</sup> at 5:38 am, weighing 8lb 1oz. Austin is brother to Mia and second child to Liz and Mike.

We are also pleased to announce the birth of Rowan Douglas Earle, born August 29<sup>th</sup>, weighing 5 lbs 12 oz. Rowan is doing well, as are new parents Leah and Jon and new grandparents Ellen and Bill, and Vicky and Martin.



## New arrival at Bell Financial.

Please join us in welcoming Christine Chappell to the team as she steps in to replace Liz who is at home with new baby Austin. Christine brings with her many years of experience at a big Canadian bank and her kind gentle personality coupled with her take charge capabilities have quickly made her invaluable. If you are looking for help with employee benefits, employee savings plans or individual life insurance, Christine is the person to call!