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## Outlived Purpose

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Gramps does the craziest things! Oh, I don't mean mentally-crazy things; just, well, old-fashioned crazy-kind of things. (According to some of the high school kids, that is). You know, things like saying, 'Justin, quick! Let's go to the woods; I'm sure I heard a woodthrush sing. If we re very quiet we may get a good view of that beautiful creature. Or things like whiting tiny pieces of furniture and animals out of wood for Krista, my eight-year-old sister, and carving tiny people out of black walnuts for her, too.



"The fresh air will clear the cobwebs from my cerebrum,"  
I told Gramps.

Krista and I are "sold" on Gramps. So are Mom and Dad. Ever since he came to live with us (after Grandma died), our home has been different -- saved and sanctified different, I mean. Gramps, you see, helped us to see that mere church membership was not the answer. He lived and prayed conviction upon us, and what a difference in our home and in our hearts since we prayed clear through and through clear!

Some of my friends in school say Gramps lives too much in the past, that he needs to "get with the times." But I hope he never changes. (I'm sure he won't). You should see how his eyes light up when he talks about things of yesteryear. I tell you, it's something to see.

True, Gramps does have a penchant for long-ago things and faces and places, but this makes him all the more wonderful and dear and interesting to each of us.

Yesterday while deep in math, my brain going in endless circles trying to solve a particular tricky problem, Gramps made his way down the hallway to my open bedroom door.

"Come in, Grandpa," I invited warmly, turning around in the chair until I was facing him. "You've got something in your mind," I teased, noting the look in his faded blue eyes.

"Justin," he began, with a bit of deliberation and hesitation, "I . . . I was wondering . . . Oh, I'm sorry," he blurted quickly, seeing the opened math book. "You've got lessons to do."

Shoving a slip of paper between the pages where I had been studying, I closed the book and stood up. "Look, Grandpa, I'd rather go with you than do anything else in the world," I said emphatically. "I learn from you. You're lovable, you're intelligent, you're smart and . . ."

"Hold it! Hold it!" Gramps exclaimed with a twinkle in his eyes as he raised his cane over my head. "Flattery! Flattery! As your generation would say, 'I don't buy it,' Justin King."

"It's not flattery, Grandpa. Honest it's not; I mean it -- every single word of it. You're the greatest and . . ."

"Tsk. Tsk, dear boy, let's change the subject. I started to ask if you'd like to take a walk with me. But you can't neglect your lessons; that would never do."

"I'll have all day tomorrow, the Lord willing; it'll be Saturday," I said quickly and informatively. "And I'm super-sure that the air will have a clearing effect upon my presently-stagnating cerebrum. I'm hung up on problem 9; I need a change of atmosphere, Gramps. Desperately so!"

"Then what are we waiting for! Let's go, Justin."

Gramps is like the old war horses I've read about -- always raring to go; and anyone who has never gone for a walk with him hasn't the slightest idea just how fast my grandfather can walk. One thing is sure, you get wherever it is he wants to go in one-half the time it would take the average person to get there. He takes long, brisk strides -- even with his cane! But I like it; it starts by blood circulating and it actually does clear the mental cobwebs from my brain. It was like that yesterday.

"Where are we going?" I asked as he started down Trillium Street. (The streets in our town are all named after flowers).

"To the railroad station, Justin. Tonight we shall see a death."

"A . . . a . . . what?" I gasped, sure I hadn't heard rightly.

"A sort of death, dear boy," Gramps repeated sadly. "Tonight is the last night for the passenger train to stop here. This will be her last stop here . . . her last run through our fair little city."

It shook me, I tell you -- Gramps statement, I mean. Why he addressed the train in the feminine gender I'll never know; I didn't even take the time to ask him. In a voice packed with emotion I said, "But it can't be, Grandpa. It can't! What'll the people do? Why, so long as I can remember we've had scads of passenger trains pulling into the station, taking on and discharging passengers and baggage and . . ."

With what sounded like a sob in Grandpa's voice, he said, "Ah, but times have changed, Justin my boy! Yes, times have brought many changes. Some for the better, I must admit, but many of them for the worse. Take this train, for instance. After tonight, the long platforms which bracket the railroads' three-track mainlines, which once were crowded with scores of passengers awaiting the arrival of the smoking, chuggin steam locomotives with long strings of tuscan red coaches, will be deserted.

"Tonight the doors will be closed. And locked -- for good."

A lump popped into my throat from somewhere deep inside my heart and I stifled the involuntary sob which rose with it. Mirrored against the decline of railroad service over the last three decades -- according to news facts -- another station dosing would be an almost insignificant event. Architecturally, the building -- according to present day buildings -- would be classed as a rather sterile structure, hardly qualifying as a rallying flag for historic-preservation buffs.

But this was the railroad's last staffed small-town station in our state and because of that, its dosing marked the demise of a once-important institution in every village and borough in the state. I shuddered at the thought.

We were at the railroad station now and grandpa's voice floated through my muddles, painful thoughts straight to my heart. "Justin," he said seriously and soberly, "take heed."

He always spoke this way when he wanted any of us to be forewarned about anything.

"Almost never is there a come-back of anything connected with railroading that is once discontinued or eliminated," he said sadly. "Passenger trains are one good example. Local freight depots are another. Branch lines and independent short lines, which once crisscrossed the mountains and valleys of our beautiful state, are yet

another. Take heed, Justin. You have a beautiful beginning -- a glorious beginning in Christ; see that the final mile of life's race is equally glorious and victorious and useful.

"Be not like the passenger trains which, according to modern day theorizing, have outlived their purpose -- jets and interstate highways replacing them. You are young yet, Justin, and impressionable, too; within another year you will be attending the college of your choosing, the Lord willing. Wicked men and women will try to kill all the good you have ever learned and fill your mind with newer, 'better,' methods and ways and vain philosophies. Stick with The Book, my boy. God's Word never changes; it remains forever and ever the same. In the midst of a rapidly changing world, with equally rapidly-changing morals and principles, keep the course of your life centered around the Christ who said, '. . . strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.'

"Beware of false prophets, which come unto you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits."

The passenger train came rumbling 'round the bend just then and both Gramps and I stood at attention, like soldiers in the presence of superior officers. We watched the few people alight from the once beautiful, streamline coaches and saw the equally small number climb aboard for destinations we knew not where. Before we were aware of it, the train was pulling away from the station . . . never to return.

I felt hot tears sting my eyes and a sudden sinking sensation develop in my heart. I was losing something -- something important which had been as much a part of me as my schooling had been. But, while I was busy learning and accepting changes -- in the name of progress -- this important something had been taken away from me. Me, and millions of other young people.

I stifled a sob, recalling the newspaper account which stated that the railroad company would welcome a tenant, such as a taxicab office, inside the once busy, commodious train station. But things would never be the same again, I knew -- no matter who or what moved into the once-hustling, bustling venerated building, which had been an integral part of our community for many years and which served as a connecting link between us and the outside world. No, things would never again be the same.

Not that there was a paucity of activity around the station; each and every day dozens of freight trains thundered past the building which now sported a fairly recent coat of paint. But it just didn't take the passage of too many freights to see why the building's importance -- and its *raison d'être* -- had vanished like the evanescent whistle of an express train in the night.

Spliced among the cars loaded with coal, ore, grain and merchandise -- commodities which brought the railroad revenue for generations -- are triple-deck automobile-hauling cars, carrying transportation to thousands of motorists, most of whom I knew would never set foot inside a railroad station.

I looked up in time to see Grandpa tip his hat just as the train disappeared from sight, its whistle a faintly-sweet, painfully-nostalgic sound in the early dusk of twilight, and suddenly I discovered that I was crying.

I didn't bother to hide my tears, nor dry them, even. Standing tall and erect, like the noble character that he was (every inch of his six-two fine that a of a Christian gentleman), Grandpa wept openly and unashamedly. Nor were we the only two who mourned. It seemed that a great percentage of our citizens came out to pay their last respects to something wonderful which had, for generations untold, been a vital and important part of their lives but which would now be only a lingering, pleasant memory.

"Shall we go now, Justin?" Grandpa asked in a hoarse whisper. "One dare not mourn forever. We are in a changing world, to be sure, but our Christ never changes. He said for us to occupy until He returns. You have lessons to finish, and I promised Krista a tiny chair for her doll house . . ."

We walked home in the gathering dusk, Grandpa and I, each thinking his private thoughts; the younger learning from the older and growing stronger in the inner man by observation and practical everyday Christian living.

Before tackling the bothersome problem -- number 9 -- when we arrived home, I dropped on my knees beside the desk and chair and prayed. By the grace of God, my life would never outlive its purpose, but down to old age it would still bring forth fruit and be useful to its Creator!

Rising quickly from my knees, I settled myself in the chair. The cobwebs had all cleared from my brain and in no time at all the math problems were finished.

Closing the book, I hurried outside in search of Gramps. A little whittling would do me good . . . even if the fellows at school did call me a 'square.'

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