

All grandparents are racist because that's just how things were back then. That's what Mom says every time I talk about some offensive thing Grandpa said.

It's never made much sense to me how things like racism or sexism or murdering people, things that are so obviously wrong could be excused by someone being eligible for glaucoma or the senior citizen discount at Denny's. But even that list isn't true because if Grandpa murdered someone he would go to jail, probably.

So lighten up on Grandpa, Mom tells me, lighten up on your grandpa, her dad, the patriarch, the very generous very angry very funny very racist person sharing my corner of the dinner table, him on the right so we don't bump elbows. I am the only lefty in my family, and it would seem my left handedness has made me less tolerant of racist grandpas. Mom says I am being disrespectful, but she never says I'm wrong. I suspect he was in the klan. I am too nervous to ask since you can't much recover from a question like that. But he is from a place that hates the Mexicans for stealing the jobs they never had and the Italians for being loud and the blacks for making them uncomfortable and the whites who dress like blacks for being a disgrace to their race, but my grandpa tells me no listen, it isn't about race - it's about being civilized. Why do they try to dress like thugs when they weren't born thugs and I say grandpa, what do you mean born a thug, are you saying thug when you mean black, because that is definitely about race.

Mom says you know what he means and I say yes, I think he means white people should wear khakis and polos like god intended, which makes my stepdad laugh and turn a little pink like the color of his polo.

Lets change the subject says my sister who knows I'm right and later drinks wine with me and tells me my god Grandpa is so racist. But she does not like to fight, not at the dinner table. Let's just talk about something else, please. What time do we need to leave for the ceremony, let's figure that out.

We are all in town for mom's graduation ceremony. She now has a Master's Degree in Project Management. We are all very proud of her, especially Grandpa. Before dinner he tells me how much it means to him to see his daughters learn things he never even knew people could learn. He says he is very proud of her and very proud of all of us, and clumsily wipes a tear from his eye.

But now at the dinner table he says I'm just tired of The Left policing my every move, I mean come on what is the first amendment even for, I'm just saying some young people don't have any respect for their appearance.

When he says The Left he means me but at this point I am angry and just want to eat this pasta. I finish my dinner in silence while my stepdad changes the conversation to football and my god did you see our defense last week and will the Redskins make the playoffs.

I think people invented family values and respect for elders to manage the confusion that comes with being disgusted by someone you owe for being alive. I once wrote my Mom a note after having a big fight about marriage and my first draft was something like Dear Mom, Thank You for Birthing Me and Not Abusing Me As A Child but Please Could You Stop Being Such A Homophobe, Sincerely Your Loving Son  
P.S. Don't Worry I Still Won't Put You in A Nursing Home Even If You Are Still A Homophobe

We arrive at the graduation ceremony in khakis and polos and full of pasta. My sister saved 7 seats instead of 8 so Grandpa volunteers to sit alone in the row behind and I sit with him, to his left so we don't bump elbows.

The ceremony begins and we cheer for Mom, calm and civilized but loud enough for her to hear us. You can tell at a ceremony how expected someone's graduation is based on how loudly their family cheers. The kids who maybe are the first in their family to graduate or who had problems in high school get loud whoops and hollers from their families, louder and longer than the program asks them to be. And sometimes the kids raise their fists in the air or make Rock On signs or shout things or do little dances on stage and today all of those kids are black or hispanic. With each dance or shout or fist raise Grandpa expresses more and more disapproval. First a scowl then a headshake then a grunt then a grunt and a headshake until finally a very pretty blonde white girl throws two peace signs up in the air and Grandpa smiles and laughs and nearly claps until he feels me watching him, The Left policing his every move.

I am angry and can't move because he is a bigot, but my mind is trapped in our time before dinner when he sits with me just the two of us for almost 20 minutes, and he cries while I ask him how he's feeling now that the cancer is officially in remission. He cries a lot and says he is very tired and a little shaken up but feels lucky because it's just made me even more thankful for family like you and your mother and I'm very glad I get to be here. I rest my hand on his shoulder and he grabs it with a wet teary hand and I say Grandpa I am very glad you are here too.