

Bedtime Story

My granddad stopped in at the oddest times – usually just a few moments before I fell asleep in the cool sheets, listening to the crickets outside. He'd just be there, between my bed and the open window, and he always said "*Adventures fall out of the sky – if you don't have time to participate, they move on.*"

I was always just at the edge of sleep when he issued the challenge, but I knew better than to ignore the call – we'd been beckoned to some mighty strange places, and he never tired of finding new ways to impress me with his skill of controlling the machine, which looked just like an iPad, and he was an old-time software programmer – a gamer who knew it well: the software interface, the zoom-in and zoom-out of time and space that he'd mastered over the years.

Sometimes my mom would hear us talking in my bedroom and she'd shout "*Leave Ted alone! He has to get some sleep for school tomorrow.*" But granddad just put his finger to his lips and after mom shouted "*You're a bad influence,*" he sat on the edge of the bed, and off we went.

We went to anywhere, and anywhen. He'd chatter and lecture as his fingers worked on the iPad screen. We went on our first jaunt just a few months after my dad disappeared – which was all a big mystery that made my mom cry for weeks, but granddad shushed me up and said, "He's all tangled up in a ball of string right now – he'll be back; you'll see."

'Course I didn't have the slightest idea what that meant – how could any 7-year-old know? But adventures beckoned, and we went wandering. Late one night he announced "UFO's are in the paper again, but do you think anyone's ever really seen one? Let's check it out, eh?"

The iPad sent us off to a dusty town in New Mexico, and I could see that it was a summer night, and the iPad screen said 1947. We waited out under stars that were so bright that it hurt my eyes, and then I saw something pass in front of the Big Dipper, and I pointed. "Right-oh, Ted, that's a UFO. Now does that look like a weather balloon to you?"

I pondered the question, because I'd never seen a weather balloon. I watched it zoom here and there, and then it went 'thud', about 500 yards away. We ran to the site, and saw people with big heads with large dark eyes, climbing out of a round airplane with no wings. We crouched down and watched them bury their dead, and then they boarded air-scooters. They returned with cows, coyotes, and a couple of farmers tied down, and took them aboard the UFO. When the sun was just about to come up, they took off, but the UFO failed and crashed again. Pretty soon, a sheriff came and looked at everything, and called somebody on his car radio. Then, Army people came, and gathered up all the junk and broken pieces and put them into a couple of big trucks, and drove off.

Granddad said quietly "*So much for UFO's, Sam – time for sleep now.*"

In a moment, I was waking up and granddad was gone.

And then there was the time that he popped into my room and said "Did you know that some dinosaurs had feathers?" I was 12, so I had studied dinosaurs, but none of them had feathers; but I knew better than to argue. He rotated the iPad a certain way, and we were off on a perfectly grand adventure to the Jurassic era, and I saw that many dinosaurs had feathers, and some had hair – it was all very cool. "Why don't they teach that in school?"

"Oh, they just don't know any better."

"Why can't we tell them?"

"Sam, they wouldn't believe us, and they'd just wreck our machine. People destroy what they can't explain."

And then one day, dad knocked on the front door, and mom almost died of a heart attack.

"I've been off on an adventure," was all he'd say to me.

A few days later, I asked him about being tangled up in strings, but he told me not to worry about it; he'd sorted it all out.

When I grew up, granddad and dad and I were together and I asked "Why aren't you afraid of screwing up the past? I read that changing even something simple in the past would have drastic effects on the future."

Granddad said "That's not how it works, Ted. The universe is a bunch of vibrating strings. All the effects of time travel are already factored in. People just don't know, so they make stuff up to cover their ignorance." Dad grunted his agreement.

"Yeah, granddad, but why don't we go back and save President Lincoln, or Kennedy? We know what's right. We could intervene – maybe warn them..."

"No, Sam, we're not God. We can't possibly know what the consequences would be, for doing something like that."

And I knew that he was right.

Finally I got enough courage to ask "Dad, what happened to you – you were gone for a mighty long time."

He hung his head and said "I did something bad, and I got caught. It took a long time to un-do it. Your granddad's right – we shouldn't presume that we know what's right or best."

Just hours before granddad died, he told me that dad had robbed a bank and had to spend time in a penitentiary. And then he handed me the iPad and a worn software programming manual and the last thing he said was "*Adventures fall out of the sky, Ted. Make each one count.*"

My parents are both dead now, but that's how I remember 'em. When I take my grandkids on adventures that fall out of the sky, you can be sure they are filled with wonder.