

Okay, I know we discussed having me make one tape a day, but I couldn't not talk about this. *(Pause)* Oh right, you can't see what I'm holding up... Not my best moment.

But okay, new approach. I think maybe I missed some steps when I was talking about my whole academia/academic fantasy thing. Like how I know it's not a perfect profession or an ideal one by any stretch of the imagination. It does have its problems. *(Pause)* Oh, wait, I think I said that. Maybe. But okay, more importantly, I think, maybe, there's something to be said about why I wandered into that Asian studies office on that day that I don't fully remember and listened to their whole talk and became completely convinced that this was something I wanted to do. And sure, you could point out that at big universities like that there are academic fairs, for lack of a better word, where all the departments can come out of the woodwork and pitch their wares for potential students. And to be fair, that sort of get-together is how I found that department yes, but I could have just walked past that booth, right? I mean, a lot of people did.

However, I was inclined to pay attention. I was inclined to listen because it wasn't a suggestion entirely out of left field... Bad way of wording it.

Basically, my grandpa probably could have been a scholar of some sort but poverty. But needing to feed his kids, the oldest of which being my mom who... *(sigh)* Well, if you count out the date of marriage and her birthdate, it was a shotgun wedding, and my mom was the baby.

And that's not as big of a deal as you might think it is. To us, it's something we can playfully tease Mom about because it doesn't bother her. But right, I guess, to some people it would be a big deal. I recognize that. But to our extended family at the time, that pregnancy only meant that Lolo had to step up and support his new family. And for the record, they were already going to get married. Eventually. They did genuinely love each other; it's just that the timing

wasn't ideal. Because now--or then--he really had to get to work to support everyone. No more schooling for him. But at least, he was finishing up high school or its equivalent, so things weren't... as dire as they could have been.

But maybe if things were different, if Mom came a little later or if his family could have supported this little satellite family for a few more years, maybe Grandpa could have gone to college. But then who knows what could have happened next. Nobody ever wins the what-if game. Maybe he would have been a scholar, but more likely than not, he would have been a doctor, a lawyer, or an engineer because those are the professions that are seen as ideal, particularly when it comes to supporting a new family.

And if that half-hearted comment about salary hit a little close to home for you, I apologize. I said that without thinking. Or without thinking it entirely through and I'm not even talking about the important point.

My grandpa loved traditional Filipino stories. Partially because he was a firm believer in that whole mythos. Like my aunt's house was built on a lot that he picked out because of the spirits he believed were living on that property. Or a tree on that property to get more specific. He told my aunt that she would have a sort of nondescript prosperity--but read the word "prosperity" as money because you know that's just how things work sometimes--if she left out offerings to these beings every so often. Which she did and still does. And while the prosperity has come, and everyone remembers the basics of what Lolo said, that's about it. No one even remembers what the spirits are supposed to be, exactly.

Grandpa died some time ago, but it's like we lose him all over again whenever we forget the details of one of his many stories. So you would that think we would make a more concerted

effort to remember the details, but you know how human arrogance can be. You think you're going to definitely for sure remember something because how could you forget it, so you don't write it down. And then you forget, and there you go, you've lost the thing you didn't think you were going to lose. And that cosmic I told you so doesn't come with the ability to get anything back.

I was just a little kid when he died. I only saw him once. Between my birth and his death, we came to see him one time, and that was a very deliberate choice. The coming not the not coming. We had to save up quite a bit to pay for that bit, but Grandpa wasn't well in the sense that his days were clearly numbered; but we didn't have a clear number; we just all knew that everything was very clearly finite. And it was, in small part, because of his drinking, which just made everything worse. But yeah, by then it was pretty bad.

(Pause)

This isn't something I would ever normally talk about, but one of my earliest memories was of my mom crying because she found out that he died and then the dull ache that came from not being able to go to the funeral. I guess, there's some tradition here where the decedent has to be buried within a very narrow period of time, and despite how imminent this was going to be, Grandpa's death still somewhat caught everyone by surprise. And there just wasn't enough notice for us to get a plane ticket, never mind three. So Mom wasn't able to go to her own father's funeral. And this was before live streaming or video chatting at all really was a thing. So *(exhale)* options were incredibly limited.

My uncle filmed it, which was great. However, instead of holding onto it to hand deliver the recording to my mom on our next visit, he tried to mail it, and predictable thing happened.

Predictable thing is something no one really wants to talk about it, and that kind of sucks because it's something I can't stop thinking about anymore. As of late, I mean. Or I mean.... That I use that expression way too much? Probably.

(Pause)

My parents did not want to admit it around me or ever really say it aloud, I would say if I had to guess, but I know they had to start making plans, as it were, for me in the wake of my accident. There were a couple days when, really, it could have all gone a different way. And you know, I'm sure the responsible thing for medical professionals to do was prepare them for the worst not because it was going to guaranteeingly happen but because it was the sort of thing that was going to sting regardless and maybe there was something compassionate about softening the landing. A tiny bit.

But now I just wonder how that would have gone. Like was this a repeat of what happened with my grandfather where zero percent chance anyone could have come to grieve me. Not just because airline ticketing but also immigration visas and all that. And if there really was a countdown running on when I would need to be buried, then even though it's possible to transport a body internationally--though rightfully difficult--then I would be buried, pretty far away from everyone.

And on one hand, a dead body should not care. But on the other, we went to the cemetery right after I made that other recording, just so we could see Grandpa's grave and bring him some spaghetti which was his favorite. And of course one of the goats who hang out in that cemetery--don't ask I still don't fully understand--is probably going to be one of the ones to eat the spaghetti, but there was something comforting about bringing it to him. It was nice, I guess.

The dead may not care, but the living do. And this distance is somewhat unforgiving to the living. That's the part of immigration I don't think my family ever thinks about. Because why would they? But now I can't stop thinking about it.

(Pause)

And it's not just about the... obvious reasons. Or maybe the obvious reasons are just manifesting themselves in odd ways. But before I was thinking about it, it made me or I wanted to piece together Grandpa's old stories. Just to, like, have a part of him back. Or to have anything of his.

My parents and I didn't get to make those routine trips to the cemetery. We don't get anything. And in many ways, I've, I'm, I'm just tired of not getting what I think is mine.

Because when I was growing up, I just wanted a family, you know? Not like the nuclear family that, yeah, is standard issue, I know that crummy argument. But all the other kids got to visit grandparents or have grandparents visit them every so often. Like the holidays. They got to go every Thanksgiving and Christmas, but my family did not get that. We didn't even have each other all the time. Dad works in a hospital, so sometimes he'd get called in. And yeah, it's necessary. *(inhale)* Like, I understand his job's important, but it's like I kept having to give things up, you know? No extended family. And then no dad. And when I was a teenager, no peace between me and my mom, either.

(More emotional) I don't even remember my grandpa that well. That is just because I was so young, though. So I really didn't have a chance. But he raised all of my cousins, pretty much. While my aunts and uncles were working, he and Lola would watch all the kids or that's how everyone says it. But it's like no. It was all the kids but me.

And right now, everyone's outside in the car-garage-yard area thing, reminiscing about Grandpa and a bunch of other experiences and memories that I don't have. So I came inside to make this tape because school work is a great excuse for anything, but yeah, it's not about this tape. Like I don't really have any updates or much to say. I just don't want to go out there.

(Knocking. Pause. Music fades in)

The Mountain's Heart is a production of Hugot Podcasting. And this end song comes from the Sounds like an Earful music supply. See you in two weeks.