

RESTWORDS

For George

A sample eulogy, written to show our range. This is not a real person.

My grandfather — or as some of you knew him, George, though he was only ever Grandpa to me — made it to ninety-one. And he wanted you to know it. He'd tell you his age whether you'd asked or not, and hold up the fingers to go with it. All of them. Both hands.

He never peeled the plastic film off anything. Not the TV remote, not the new phone we got him, not the screen on the microwave. “So it stays new,” he'd say. Everything in that house was kept on the verge of being used for the first time. I think about that a lot now.

The freezer in the garage was full. It was always full — loaves of bread, bags of peas, things from years ago wearing little crystals of frost. He'd grown up with not enough, and he was never going to be caught short again. Not for the rest of his life, which turned out to be a long one.

There was a drawer — everyone in the family knows the drawer — full of manuals and warranty cards and coiled-up cords for appliances we no longer owned. Some for appliances he no longer owned. He could not throw them out. What if. He never once needed any of it and he was never once willing to risk it.

And the pens. He kept every pen he ever got, dead or alive, all in the same mug by the phone, so picking one was a gamble. You'd grab one, scribble, nothing. Grab another. Nothing. He knew exactly which ones were dead. He kept them anyway. I never understood it. I don't think he did either.

Here's what I've worked out, standing here. My grandfather spent ninety-one years keeping things for later. The good stuff stayed wrapped. The freezer stayed full. The drawer stayed shut. He was so careful, so sure there'd be a day he'd need it all.

I hope, somewhere in there, he knew the day was every day. That the people in this room were the thing he'd actually been saving for, and we were here the whole time, and he never had to wait for us.

So here's to George. Grandpa. Ninety-one years, and not one of them taken for granted — just saved, carefully, for good.