

Respect – A Poem about Jim Cassidy

They say respect me, respect my views, my family.
Respect the rules, respect the law,
The speed limit.
But respect is more than that, isn't it?
It's recognising someone's worth,
Their past, their history.
Something they've done,
A promise they've made,
A price they've paid.
For someone else,
Something else,
Bigger than themselves.

I saw it once,
Respect like that.
When I was only twenty three,
And it was my grandpa and me,
On a flight from London to Belfast.
You see, my grandpa was getting older,
More wobbly, forgetful.
He couldn't fly by himself.
No, not fly, he used to fly,
A Lancaster Bomber, 50 raids,
To Germany and back.

He couldn't be flown by himself.
He couldn't manage the airport,
The stairs and the gates,
The rushing, the people, the I-can't-be-late.
He couldn't manage his bag,
His passport, his ticket.
So I was there to pack it and pick it-
Up when he dropped it.
And his cap,
And when he stumbled up stairs,
And dropped things in his lap,
But he wasn't always like that.

He once was young, brave and strong,
And travelled a long-
Way to fly and drop bombs,
For the Royal Australian Air Force.

You see, when he was only twenty three,
He fought for us, for you, for me.
He fought for freedom, for those in need,
Of saving from Nazi Germany.

But let's go back to 2012,
A year of the Olympics in London,
The Tories, David Cameron.
And the year when I was only twenty three,
And on a plane - my grandpa and me.
When we were sitting in row three,
Sitting in seats A and B.
When a man came to sit in seat C.
A man who if you'd seen him,
You'd have crossed the road.
A man with a shaved head, tattoos and
muscles,
Lots of muscles.

My grandpa was reading a book that told of
history, war and heroes.
It told his story, his life, his flights,
Over the cold, dark sea,
When he was only twenty three.
And this man with muscles and tats,
Noticed the book and my grandfather's ac-
-cent and he asked to read it.
To read of my grandpa's life and his flights,
To read of his war, victory and fights.
And he bought my grandpa tea,
Overpriced tea on an Easyjet flight,
When we never bother whether it's day or it's
night.

I asked what he did,
And he said in hushed tones,
That he worked for the Navy,
And he couldn't imagine the things my
grandpa had seen.
The places he'd been,
The people he'd freed,
When he was only twenty three.

My grandpa said he could keep it,
The book that told of his life and dreams.
He had plenty of copies,
he picked up one every time he saw it in a
shop, on a shelf.
And the man didn't know how to show
thanks,
Not for the book,
But for the time spent in cold, draughty Lancs.
Flying over grey, stormy seas,
Not knowing when could be,
The end of him, of the -
War and everything it means,
To fight for freedom,
When you're only twenty three.

But I won't forget it,
The book, the man or the tea.
Or the way he held up the plane so that those
in row three,
Could exit ahead of everyone else.
Because no-one else could see,
What my grandpa did at twenty three.
And that's what respect looks like,
A man I'd never met,
Buying overpriced tea,
And thanking my grandpa for him being free,
Before holding up a plane,
For something my grandpa did,
When he was only twenty three.

When we landed in Belfast airport,
The man who had been sitting in seat C,
Jumped up,
Held up his arm,
And motioned to us in seats A and B,
To leave first.
Before everyone behind row three,
All the one hundred passengers wanting to
leave.
So I turned to my grandpa,
Who hadn't undone his seatbelt,
Or picked up his coat.
As 200 eyes looked at us,
And the big, tattooed man who held them
back,
And they didn't argue.
As a man, now 91, struggled to get out of his
seat.

*By Elizabeth Coulter, proud granddaughter
of
Jim Cassidy*



Little did they know that this man was once
twenty three,
And fighting for them and for me,
To know liberty and free-
-dom from oppression, death and tears.
And as we walked down the run way,
The man thanked us and was on his way,
and my grandpa said 'who's he?'
He'd forgotten the book, the man and the tea.