

GRANDPA'S LIST

by Douglas Evans

Things I will do in my life:	
Visit:	Others:
1. North and South Pole ✓	38. Sail across Pacific Ocean ✓
2. Great Wall of China ✓	39. Bicycle across U.S. ✓
3. The Tower of London ✓	40. Travel around world by train ✓
4. Panama Canal ✓	41. Become an Eagle Scout ✓
5. Parthenon, Greece ✓	42. Appear on TV ✓
6. Great Pyramid, Egypt ✓	43. Appear in a movie ✓
7. Taj Mahal, India	44. Fly an airplane solo ✓
8. Eiffel Tower, France ✓	45. Fly in a balloon ✓
9. The White House ✓	46. Learn to kayak ✓
10. Statue of Liberty ✓	47. Earn black belt in karate ✓
Explore:	48. Learn to ski ✓
11. Nile River ✓	49. Learn to cook well ✓
12. Amazon River ✓	50. Learn to surf ✓
13. Mississippi River ✓	51. Learn to play piano ✓
14. Colorado River ✓	52. Hike John Muir Trail ✓
15. Congo River, Africa ✓	53. Hike into Grand Canyon ✓
16. Yantze River, China ✓	54. Speak French ✓
17. Yellowstone National Park ✓	55. Speak Japanese ✓
18. Depths of the ocean ✓	56. Write a novel ✓
19. Great Barrier Reef ✓	57. Compose music ✓
20. North Slope, Alaska ✓	58. Run a marathon
Climb:	59. Do 100 pushups ✓
21. Matterhorn ✓	60. Do 200 sit-ups ✓
22. Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa ✓	61. High jump 6 feet ✓
23. Mt. Fuji, Japan ✓	62. Skydive from 10,000 feet ✓
24. Mt. Olympus, Greece ✓	63. Read all Shakespeare plays
25. Face of El Capitan ✓	64. Read Dickens & Twain ✓
26. Highest peak in every state ✓	65. Paint with oil paints ✓
Photograph:	66. Throw a clay pot ✓
27. Yosemite Falls ✓	67. Dive in a submarine ✓
28. Niagara Falls ✓	68. Study music of Mozart ✓
29. Victoria Falls, Africa ✓	69. Study music of Bach ✓
30. Iguazu Falls, Brazil ✓	70. Build a telescope ✓
31. Total eclipse of sun ✓	71. Learn to tie fifty knots ✓
32. Sunset on Easter Island ✓	72. Read Bible ✓
Swim in:	73. Read Koran ✓
33. Every ocean ✓	74. Rebuild a car engine ✓
34. Each Great Lake ✓	75. Build a guitar ✓
35. Lake Victoria, Kenya ✓	76. Work on a farm ✓
36. Dead Sea ✓	78. Build a house ✓
37. Great Salt Lake, Utah ✓	79. Marry and have kids ✓

The list fell from the book I was reading.

“*Things I will do in my life,*” I read off the yellowed piece of paper. A check mark followed each item but three. At the bottom appeared Grandpa’s name.

I studied the white-haired, overweight man slouched in the leather chair across from me. Since coming to live with Mom and me a year ago, Grandpa had rarely left this room. So what was this list? Things that Grandpa had done? Flew an airplane? Climbed the Matterhorn? Swam in every ocean? Not that old man.

The book I held, *Plays of William Shakespeare*, looked boring, so I snapped it shut.

Grandpa looked up. “What’s that there, David?” he asked. “What’s that paper you have there?”

I handed the list to him. “Something you put in this book.”

A smile, the first I’d seen in months, crossed Grandpa’s face. He nodded. “I wrote this list when I was twelve, your age, David,” he said. “My goals. Things I dreamed of doing in my lifetime.”

“Oh,” I said, disappointed. It was as I expected. The paper was nothing more than a list of Grandpa’s dreams, things he wanted to do.

From that evening on, however, things changed at our house.

When I returned home from school the next day, Grandpa's chair was empty.

"David, I'm worried," my mother said. "Your grandfather left the house hours ago. And he was wearing running shorts and shoes."

A snort of laughter escaped from me. "Grandpa's running?" I said.

"It's getting dark, David. Go find him. Please!"

I ran down the street to the park. In the half-light, I spotted Grandpa's stooped shoulders and white legs moving slowly along the running path.

"Grandpa!" I shouted. The narrow figure turned and started toward me.

"I'm in training there, David," Grandpa explained, as we walked home together. "I've signed up for the Portland Marathon in May."

This floored me. My grandfather was going to run twenty-six miles miles! Not likely.

But that evening brought more surprises. I found Grandpa sitting in his chair, reading *Plays of William Shakespeare*. What had gotten into the man? Then I remembered.

"Reading all of Shakespeare's play was on that list of yours, wasn't it, Grandpa?" I asked. "So was running a marathon. Right?"

“Yep,” he replied, without lifting his eyes off the page. “There are a few items left to do.”

I jolted. “You mean you’ve done all those other things on that list of yours? You visited the North Pole? You explored the Amazon River?”

Grandpa nodded.

“You bicycled across the United States? You sailed across the Pacific Ocean? Everything with a checkmark by it?”

Again he nodded. “Over the years whenever I had free time, I’d take out my list and attempt to check off another challenge,” he said. “One by one I reached my goals.”

Grandpa grew silent, thinking. Then he looked at me and said, “Why don’t you start a list there, David?”

“Me? You’re kidding. I can’t do any of those things.”

“Neither could I when I wrote my list,” said Grandpa. “Go get some paper. I’ll give you a hand.”

I grabbed a pen and a sheet of paper. At first, I merely copied off Grandpa’s list.

“Dream big there, David,” Grandpa said. “When I was your age few people went to the South Pole or dove to the depths of the ocean.”

So I added new items to my list:

Visit 100 countries

Fly in outer space

Drive a solar car across United States

Build a robot

Write software for a video game

Climb the tallest peak in every continent

Travel around the world north to south

“That’s more like it,” said Grandpa.

“I can’t believe I’ll do one of those things,” I said.

The next day Grandpa was waiting for me in the front yard.

“Put on your sneakers there, David,” he said. “The Portland race is in nine months. Now’s as good a time as any to start checking off your list.”

My eye grew wide. “Me? Run twenty-six miles? But I’m too young.”

“And I’m too old,” said Grandpa. “Now let’s get started.”

So that’s how I ended up running in the park with Grandpa each evening. On the Internet we found a marathon training program for kids and people over fifty, so we knew it was possible. After the first day of running, however, my legs ached, and I was ready to bag the whole idea. But day by day, week by week my legs strengthened, and my breathing came easier. After the first month we were running two miles a day and after two months we ran four miles.

One day in April Grandpa astonished Mom and me again. “I’m

going to India,” he announced.

“India!” my mother exclaimed. “Father, you can’t!”

But I knew what Grandpa was up to. “You’re going to visit the Taj Mahal,” I said. “Right?”

He winked at me.

When Grandpa returned at the end of the month, I watched him add another check mark to his list. “Next, David, the Portland Marathon,” he said. “After that, my list will be complete.”

On the morning of the race, Mom drove Grandpa and me up to Portland. Side by side, we stood at the starting line. Hundreds of other runners surrounded us. I figured I was the youngest person there. Grandpa appeared to be the oldest.

Crack! The gun went off.

“Dream big there, David,” Grandpa called out, and he disappeared into the running swarm.

I started at a slow steady pace. My arms pumped and my feet pounded the pavement in a constant rhythm.

The first seven miles passed with no problem. But by mile ten, my feet felt like bricks and my gut hurt. At mile eleven I was about to throw up. I hated that list of mine.

A mile later, on the verge of quitting, I spied a stooped figure ahead of me. It was Grandpa. He was staggering more than

running.

Quickly I caught up with him. His face was pale and his white hair gleamed with sweat.

“Dream big, Grandpa!” I called out. “We’re going to finish this race.”

Grandpa looked toward me and smiled. “You bet we are,” he said. “One step at a time.”

We crossed the finish line together. Mom was there to greet us with open arms.

Back home that evening, Grandpa added the last check mark to his list, and I dashed off the first one on mine. Afterward, I sunk into Grandpa’s chair exhausted.

The moment I closed my eyes, something thumped onto my stomach. My eyes opened to see Grandpa standing there, grinning. In my lap lay the book *Plays of William Shakespeare*.

“Ready to start another challenge?” Grandpa said.

I groaned.