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Hiking in the Smokies with my Grandpa

My family's favorite vacation destination is The Smoky Mountains in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Two years ago, my cousin decided to get married there, and the entire Norwood family decided to make it a vacation. We had never gone on a vacation with everyone before. My grandparents love the Smokies, too. This was so special to my grandpa, because he was all about spending time with his family. We decided to stay in cabins right next door to one another. We were looking forward to hiking through the national forest together.

We hiked every trail and saw every beautiful waterfall in the forest. My grandpa was on a mission to see black bears. We have seen them on our trips to the Smokies, but my grandpa has never gotten to see one in the forest. He was determined to see one. We hiked all day long and never saw a bear. He would be so tired and would need to take a break, but was ready to continue as soon as he rested. My grandpa had heart and circulation problems, so I knew this was very difficult for him. He never let on that the hiking was hard for him.

We were almost late for my cousins' beautiful mountain view wedding because my grandpa had us in the forest bright and early the morning of the wedding. We laugh about it now, but we surely cut it close. We were so amazed by the beauty of the national

forest; it was so hard to leave. It is absolutely the most beautiful and peaceful place to ever visit. The nature we observed on our hikes was breathtaking.

Little did we know, this would be our last trip with our grandpa. I feel like God sent us there together. It was a last minute trip that seemed to fall into place perfectly. We did everything as a family on this trip. We hiked and even took a road trip through the Appalachian trail. We took so many photographs along our journey. I am so thankful that we were blessed to have had this awesome hiking vacation with our grandpa. Two weeks after we got home from this memorable trip, my grandpa went into the hospital and passed away two months later. We had no idea that trip would be our last with him. That trip will stay in my heart forever. We have not been hiking since, but are planning a trip there this summer. It will be bitter sweet, but I know he will be with us in spirit, hiking right along side us. I will definitely be bear watching just for him!