

GRANDPA - Paul Chidyausiku

1 They say they are healthier than me
2 Though they can't walk to the end of a mile
3 At their age I walked forty at night
4 To wage a battle at dawn.

5 They think they are healthier than me:
6 If their socks get wet they catch a cold;
7 When my sockless feet got wet, I never sneezed –
8 But they still think they are healthier than me.

9 On a soft mattress over a spring bed,
10 They still have to take a sleeping-pill;
11 But I, with reeds cutting into my ribs,
12 My head resting on a piece of wood,
13 I sleep like a babe and snore.

14 They blow their noses and pocket the stuff –
15 That's hygienic so they tell me;
16 I blow my nose into the fire,
17 But they say that is barbaric.

18 If a dear one dies I weep without shame;
19 If someone jokes, I laugh with all my heart.
20 They stifle a tear as if to cry was something wrong.
21 But they also stifle a laugh,
22 As if to laugh was something wrong too.
23 No wonder they need psychiatrists!

24 When I have more than one wife
25 They tell me that hell is my destination,
26 But when they have one and countless mistresses,
27 They pride themselves on cheating the world!

28 No, let them learn to be honest with themselves first
29 Before they persuade me to change my ways,
30 Says my grandfather, the proud old man.

Paul Chidyausiku



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In this poem the speaker, a grandfather, is defending his traditions against the criticism of young people. The younger generation looks down on old traditions. The younger generation look down on old people, in general. The message that the poet wants to convey is that the younger generation should not look down on or scorn tradition, but respect tradition and the wisdom that comes with age. The message that the poet wants to convey is referred to as the **theme** of a poem. The grandfather is pictured as a wise and proud man who had experienced a lot in his lifetime: he took part in battles, he slept in the open, he lost people close to him.

1 *They say they are healthier than me*
2 *Though they can't walk to the end of a mile*
3 *At their age I walked forty at night*
4 *To wage a battle at dawn.*

Line 1: 'They' refers to the younger generation/younger people. 'Me' refers to the grandpa.

Lines 2 - 3: The grandpa says that the younger generation is too unfit and lazy to walk a mile, but when he was their age, he could walk 40 miles in one night.

Line 4: 'To wage a battle' could mean that when he was their age he had to fight in a war. 'dawn' is daybreak.

5 *They think they are healthier than me:*
6 *If their socks get wet they catch a cold;*
7 *When my sockless feet got wet, I never sneezed –*
8 *But they still think they are healthier than me.*

Lines 5 - 6: They (young people) think they are healthier than older people, but they get ill very easily 'if their socks get wet they catch a cold;'

Lines 7 - 8: The grandpa could walk barefoot and he never got sick - 'I never sneezed' - but still younger people think they are superior/healthier than the older generation.

9 *On a soft mattress over a spring bed,*
10 *They still have to take a sleeping-pill;*
11 *But I, with reeds cutting into my ribs,*
12 *My head resting on a piece of wood,*
13 *I sleep like a babe and snore.*

Lines 9 - 10: The younger generation sleep on soft mattresses and beds with springs, but yet they are still so 'weak' and spoiled that they need to take a sleeping pill to sleep.

Lines 11 - 12: Grandpa slept outside on the ground - 'reeds' (grass) cutting into my ribs', and his only pillow was a piece of wood.

Line 13: **SIMILE:** **'I sleep like a babe and snore.'** - he compares the way he sleeps to a sleeping baby. To 'sleep like a baby' - To experience a very deep and restful sleep; to sleep soundly. He sleeps so well, he even snores!

The grandfather compares the way in which he sleeps in seemingly uncomfortable circumstances, to the way in which a baby sleeps. This type of comparison (the words "like" and "as" are used) in poetry is called a **simile**.

14 *They blow their noses and pocket the stuff –*
15 *That's hygienic so they tell me;*
16 *I blow my nose into the fire,*
17 *But they say that is barbaric.*

Lines 14 - 15: The younger generation uses handkerchiefs - they blow their noses into handkerchiefs and then place the handkerchiefs back in their pockets. And they think THAT is civilised and hygienic! 'That's hygienic so they tell me;' - **SARCASM**

Lines 16 - 17: The traditional way of blowing your nose into the fire (like grandpa does) is 'barbaric' according to the younger generation.

18 *If a dear one dies I weep without shame;*
19 *If someone jokes, I laugh with all my heart.*
20 *They stifle a tear as if to cry was something wrong.*
21 *But they also stifle a laugh,*
22 *As if to laugh was something wrong too.*
23 *No wonder they need psychiatrists!*

Lines 18 - 19: The older generation is not ashamed to laugh or cry. The grandfather says that when someone that the loves, dies, he weeps without trying to hide his hurt. In the same way, he laughs when something is funny – in other words, he does not hide his emotions.

Lines 20 - 22: The younger generation, however, keep in their tears and hide their hurt as if it is something to feel ashamed of. They also laugh in a constrained way/they are too cool to laugh. The grandfather is telling us that they have lost their spontaneity.

Line 23: That is, of course, the reason they need psychiatrists. Psychiatrists are doctors that assist people with emotional problems. The grandfather clearly feels that modern people would have fewer problems if they show their hurt and joy to the rest of the world and not act as if they should be ashamed of their feelings.

24 *When I have more than one wife*
25 *They tell me that hell is my destination,*
26 *But when they have one and countless mistresses,*
27 *They pride themselves on cheating the world!*

Lines 24 - 25: The grandfather practices polygamy, in other words, he has more than one wife. The young people remind him that his soul will end up in hell because of that.

Lines 26 - 27: The grandfather, cannot understand why young men marry one wife and then keep a lot of mistresses, in other words they cheat on their wives and are proud when they get away with it. The grandfather cannot understand this, because traditionally he would marry all his wives for the whole world to see – he does not cheat or lie.

28 *No, let them learn to be honest with themselves first*
29 *Before they persuade me to change my ways,*
30 *Says my grandfather, the proud old man.*

Line 28: He thinks young people who scorn his traditions must first do some Introspection/they must have a look at their own ways: 'be honest with themselves first'.

Line 29: The grandfather is determined: he will not be persuaded (talked over) to change his way of doing things.

Line 30: The speaker in the last stanza is the grandchild: “Says my grandfather ...” He reminds us that his grandfather takes pride in his tradition.

NOTES ON THE POEM

TYPE OF POEM

This is a **modern poem** or **free verse**:

1. The poem has **no fixed rhyme scheme** and
2. The **lines are not equally long**

TONE

You will soon know what the **tone** of a poem is **when you imagine what the person sounds like when he speaks these lines**. We can easily imagine that the grandpa is upset with the younger generation and does not think much of their ideas.

So we may say that the tone of this poem is **mocking, contemptuous or scornful**, sometimes even **sarcastic**.

QUESTIONS ON “GRANDPA”

1. Who is the speaker in this poem? (1)
2. What type of poem is this? (1)
3. Supply two reasons for your answer in Question 2. (2)
- 4.1 Find two reasons in stanza one and two why the grandfather thinks that he is healthier than the young people who criticize him. (2)
- 4.2 Which two things contributed to his discomfort when the grandfather slept in the open? (2)
- 4.3 Quote the **simile** in stanza 3. (1)
5. Read the poem to complete the following table:
Write your answers down like this: 5.1/ 5.2 / 5.3. (3)

Grandfather’s tradition which he defends	The modern, civilized way the younger generation prefers.
5.1 Blows nose into the fire	1.
5.2 Laugh and cries spontaneously. Shows his true emotions	2.
5.3 Practices polygamy. Has many wives.	3.

6. Why does the grandfather think that using a handkerchief is not very effective (not the best way to do this)? (2)
7. What is the meaning of ‘barbaric’ in stanza 4? (1)
8. What is a psychiatrist? (1)
9. Explain **in your own** words why, according to the grandfather, younger people need psychiatrists? (2)
10. What is the meaning of ‘persuade’ (line 29)? (1)
11. What is the **THEME** of this poem? (2)
12. Describe the **TONE** used throughout the poem. (2)
13. Which advice does the grandfather give the modern generation in the last stanza of the poem? (2)