

Grandfather's Eyes
Dan Swanson

Your sad, piercing eyes stare back
From a faded photograph taken long ago
Would you have been proud, rich, or famous
Stolen time means I will never know.

You came from your native Sweden as a boy
As a stowaway with the cattle and all alone
A refugee from poverty, prejudice, and pain
To pursue a dream of making America your home.

Stopped at Ellis Island and forced to go back
No family, no money, and not yet a man
With grit, courage, and an unwavering vow
To never live your life in your father's land.

Crossing Virginia's pristine mountains and rivers
To old growth forests under an azure sky
Working the timber beside the lonely men
Seeking your fortune where many men die.

Waking to the wail of the lumber camp's train
Hands frozen by the bare steel of a crosscut saw
Days spent amid the aroma of hemlock and pine
Shivering from a north wind before spring's thaw.

You built a family and an American life
With a strong back and the sweat of your brow
A life tragically cut short by a tree that fell
Leaving questions on your life's arc even now.

You gaze wistfully from a hundred years ago
In your sartorial splendor for all the world to see
I discover a resemblance that is hard to deny
When I realize that I am looking back at me.