by George Rolph ( English 101--Dodds) The Assignment: Write a personal experience essay in the participant's role. In a series of vignettes describe a significant time in youra life and the discoveries you made about that timea. I had to be seven years old and all I lived for was baseball.a Dad took my brother and me out in the backyard and pitched to us hour after hour. One day Dad asked if I would like to go to the St. Louis Cardinals' baseball game. I couldn'ta believe it. It was like a dream come truea . So the next night we piled into the car with the next-door neighbor's father and his two sons and off we went. When we got there the crowd was large and noisy, and I was so small I couldn't see anything but people's buttsa . I was kind of scared, but Dad took my hand and we made it to our seats just £!nea . There were many things I remember, like the big scoreboard, or coming close to catching a foul ball, but what I remember most was the food Dad let me have, hot dogs, popcorn, cotton candy, and pop. He let me eat as much as I wanted. I was like a kid in a candy shop with a hundred dollar billa . It was the time of my life. I fell asleep in Dad's lap on the way home, and the next thing I knew I was waking up in my bed the morning after. I lay there for a few moments thinking about the night beforea . He had picked me over my two brothers to go to the balalgamea , and I didn't know whya. It had been the evening of my short lifea . I wanted to tell him how much fun I had and tell him how much I loved him for taking me. It was a love that started that night and a love I have never once doubted to this day. So, I ran down the stairs to tell him, but he had gone to work. When he got home from work I climbed up on the couch next to him. We talked about the ball game and the great evening we had had togethera. I was about to tell him what he meant to me but when he put his arms around me and started to watch the evening newsa , I didn'ta have to because he knew and I knewa. One day shortly after the ball game I was in the car with Dad. I was a young inquisitive boy who asked him question after questiona . Finally, after a few miles of questions he said, "I have a question for youa. Why do you ask so many questions?a" I said, "Because you know everythinga . 11 \_That's when he told me 14 6 something I' 11 never forget. "If you keep your mouth shut anda your eyes and ears open you will learn a lot.a" He loved sharing all his opinions and thoughts with me, and that made me feel so importanta. Then that thought of mine came to me again and I wanted to tell him. I didn't.a I knew there would be another time so I just asked him another questiona . Besides, he already knew and I knew. It was not long after our question-and-answer car ride that Mom was cooking dinner one wet, rainy summer afternoon. I walked into the kitchen and asked, "Is Dad home?a" She said, "You know your father doesn't get home this early. " I replied, "I thought you told me it was bad luck to start dinner before Dad got homea ." I don't remember her reply, but it was a little while later the phone rang. It was the hospital. Dad had slid off the road and dropped twenty feet into a creeka. The metal ring from the steer ing wheel had punctured his head right above his right eye and the doctors didn't know if he would make ita . The next thing I remember was sitting in the back seat of the neighbora's cara . My mom and brother were crying hysterically and all I could do was sit and watch the scenery fly by at jet-like speed. I knew that he wasn't going to die because he had mahy more questions to answer. Besides, I had to tell him something, something impor tant. He lived, of course, but when he came home from the hospi tal I never talked to him about it. That was okay, because he knew and I knew of our lovea. When I was finally as tall as the top of the car, Dad took me pheasant hunting. The first couple of times I just walked along with him and got in his way. But I could tell he enjoyed having me with him, and it was great, a son just being out with Dad. A couple days after our second hunt, he asked if I wanted to carry a real shotgun the next time we wenta. I was ecstatic and couldn't wait. That evening he brought home a .410 shot gun and I got a crash course on its use and care. My first real hunt was only two days awaya. It was a fun evening and I asked a mil lion questions and he answered them all. I hardly slept for two daysa. I think he was just as excited as I because we were up and on our way earlier than usuala . After the first hunt, hunting was to become a fall ritual from that day on. We joined a club, bought a hunting dog and hunted well into my middle twentiesa . The only reason we stopped was that the government took our land away. But that first hunt was more than just a hunt. We were now a team, an inseparable team. Not once over the years did he go without me or I without hima. It was the start of a new phase in our relationship. It was better felt than describeda. I guess you could say that in thea hunting field he tried to make a man out of me and mold me into the kind of person he wanted me to be. Then one evening a couple of years later, sitting at the kitchen table drinking beer, wea got to talking about those hunting days. About all those great shots, all the ones that got away, but especially about all the time the two of us just spent together. We talked and drank un til my eyes were closinga. Finally I stood up and said, "I have go to bed.a" That's not all I wanted to say, but that was okay. And then he said, "I'll see you in the morning. " I knew that'sa not all he wanted to say, but that was okay, too. 147 One spring day, later in life than I care to say, I walked into my parents' house and asked whether I could move back again. Yes, it had been another disastrous love affair, and it was time to hide behind Mom and Dad's apron strings again. It had hap pened numerous times during the years and I knew what the answer was going to be. So when I asked Dad whether I could move home again until I got back on my feet, his eyes got big and he said, "Surea, your mother and I miss you not being around and we hope you never leave again. "a No matter what I did he was always be hind mea . He never gave me long lecturesa, only sound advicea . He never harped on me, and gave me plenty of room to find out about life on my own. We were very close but I always had room to breathe. He just made sure he was there when I needed him. I loved him so. Even though I knew the answer before I asked him it still gave me a great feeling inside, and I wanted to tell him how I really felt, but all I said was, "Thanks Dad.a" As I walked back to my bedroom, I knew that was not all he wanted to tell me, but once again, that was okay. I had stayed about three monthsa, and moved out into my own apartment. When the day came, I went over to help him into the car for his final trip to the hospital.a Like a warrior badly outnumbered he had fought cancer for two yearsa . He had lost and only he and I knew. As we walked arm and arm down the driveway he told me he wouldn't be back. I knew he was righta. It took all my power not to break down. I knew what I had to tell him,a but every time I tried to talk, the tears swelled in my eyes. I quietly helped him into the car and our eyes met. I knew in stantly I didn't have to say a word. My family and I put him in the hospital on sunday, and when I walked into the room on Tuesday evening I knew he had been righta. I sat down next to him and picked up his hand. His only sign of life was the cancerous bowling ball in his stomach, barely moving up and down. His hand was cold. It wasn'ta the hand that had led me through the aisles of the ball gamea. It wasn't the hand that had led me across all those dangerous streets of life and it wasn't the hand that he had put on my shoulder when he was especially prouda. It was cold, the kind of cold when death is near. I sat there and just stared at him, and I wanted to jump up and tell him my innermost thoughts, hoping he would sit up and tell me his, but I didn't.a I got up and left the room. As I drove home, the more I thought about it the more it came to me: it didn't matter because he knew and I knew. He died two days later without a whimpera. The day after Dad's death was probably the toughest day of my life. I put my best suit on and prepared to see him lying in peace. As I approached the casket I could feel the tears well up in my eyes. I had left home early, and when I got there, I stood before him in an eerie, chilling silencea. I started to cry. I cried harder inside than out because that's the way society says men have to cry. I cried so hard my stomach was like a pretzela . I cried because I missed him, I cried because he had dedicated his life to me. I cried because he had given me so much, and I 148 cried because I needed him to answer more questionsa . I cried be cause I wasn't ready to be the man he wanted me to be. Or was I? I cried because I realized how much I had meant to him and how much he had meant to mea . But I have never shed a tear because we never once spoke the wordsa , "I love you.a" The Evaluation: George Rolph writes with detail,a imagination, feeling, and insight about the nearly wordless bond of love he shared with his fathera . His is the kind of writing that sticks in my mind long after I've finished it--a series of images potent with emotion and understanding. And that's the kind of delicious after-taste good writing should l