

Face Time with Grandpa

By Jennifer Espejis

The year is 2050. What follows is a transcript of the audio portion of virtual reality Facetime conversation. Using his City of Lake Oswego Fiber terabit connection, 96-year-old Lucas Smith is talking to his 32-year-old granddaughter Ashley, who lives in Helena, Montana.

Ashley: Hi grandpa! How are you today?

Lucas: Just fine, Ashley. Your grandma and I took a stroll on the round-the-lake trail today. It was nice to get out.

Ashley: And what's that you're drinking? Mocha? It smells good.

Lucas: Yep. My own special recipe.

Ashley: Ah, with whiskey. Can I have a sip?

Lucas: (laughs) I don't think VR can do that yet. You'll need to visit in person.

Ashley: And how's your garden doing?

Lucas: Great! We caught a lot of rain in the cistern last winter. With the drip irrigation system, it looks like we'll get through September without having to hook up the hose. We have more squash and cucumbers than we can eat...probably trade some of it at the Farmers Market, if your cousin doesn't take it all.

Ashley: So how *is* Amy? It's been a couple of months since I've talked to her.

Lucas: She and Jorge are doing well. Do you realize that little Lupe is in high school already? The school district finally got rid of the buses and gave all the kids electric-assist bikes. She feels pretty cool getting to school—calls it her motorcycle. But she still gets plenty of exercise on the hills here.

Ashley: So grandpa, have you taken it for a spin?

Lucas: Nope; don't trust my balance. I let our car do most of the driving, too. But we hardly use it. I keep it plugged in to charge off the roof panels during the day and power our lights at night. But it usually just sits there. That's OK with me; the batteries keep our lights on as late as we need them.

Ashley: Oh, like until eight, ha ha.

Lucas: Very funny. But speaking of which, did you know that Lupe is fluent in Mandarin?

Ashley: No. But what does that have to do with staying up until 8?

Lucas: The time change. The school has her paired up with a girl in Shenzhen. They get together for an hour or so every day. But with the time change, she has to wait until evening. They're supposed to switch off between Mandarin and English every day. Lupe took Biyu with her to a Timbers game last week, and said she really enjoyed it.

Ashley: Huh?

Lucas: Oh, you know. Virtually. By the way, you asked if I've ridden Lupe's bike. I try to avoid two-wheeled gizmos, but your grandma and I biked into downtown Portland last week.

Ashley: So how did you do that?

Lucas: They rent these velopeds down at Foothills. They had a two-seater that was easy to use. We zipped down the Willamette Shoreline path at around fifty kilometers per hour with hardly any electric assist. You'd have been impressed by these two old geezers.

Ashley: You're hardly a geezer. But I wish we had something like that around here. We get rides on the jitneys but it's not the same.

Lucas: Well, you meet interesting people that way.

Ashley: In Montana, sometimes too interesting. But I suppose you could say the same for Portland. Anyhow, how's your job going?

Lucas: Keeps me out of trouble. You know the Sustainability Network spun off a nonprofit? I spend a couple of hours a day with it. A company on Kruse Way came up with a sort of combination garbage disposal and 3-D printer. So we're testing it on some homes here in LO. You stick your garbage in it, it breaks the stuff down into constituent molecules, and then sends it to the printer to make stuff. Like this shirt—what do you think?

Ashley: I was going to say it had the look of old coffee grounds and banana peels.

Lucas: No, we compost that!

Ashley: I was just kidding. Your shirt does look nice, Grandpa. Can you make me one?

Lucas: Sure. The cameras already captured your measurements. You're not pregnant again, are you?

[Silence]

Lucas: Well, I'll be.

Jennifer Espejis is a freelance copy editor who moved to Lake Oswego from the LA area three years ago for her husband's job. They live in the Mountain Park area and have a daughter at St. Mary's Academy.