**Back Home**

# **Unit 9**

Brian tilted his juice glass back and gulped down his orange juice like it was the most **vital** nutrient for his survival. To him, it most assuredly was, well, that and pizza. He really wished there were a few slices left over from the night before. There was nothing better in the morning than cold pizza and a huge glass of orange juice.

He heard his mother making her way to the kitchen. Since she really didn’t appreciate the **casual** way he released the gas that formed in his stomach from the juice, he turned his head away and put his hand over his mouth to **stifle** the large burp he was about to expel.

“Well, well – it appears you may have acquired some manners while we lived with your grandmother the last couple of months. I can only hope this first sign of consideration for others will **persist** long into the future!” Brian’s mom joked.

“Oh, Mom, I think you are just too sensitive to natural, human emissions,” Brian quipped.

“I don’t think so! Your belches are anything but human. They are more accurately the most **gruesome** combination of noise pollution and offensive odor I have ever been subjected to. The only good side of your lack of control over your belching is that I shouldn’t have to worry about you ever getting a second date with a girl once she’s been exposed to your idiosyncrasies.” Brian’s mom bent at the abdomen; she was laughing so hard.

“My burps are manly. They don’t **erode** a girl’s interest in me; they build the interest. It’s practically love at first burp.” Brian couldn’t stop the chuckle that formed in his throat.

“Mom, you sure seem a lot happier since we moved into our own house again.”

“I think I am. Nothing against your grandmother, but I was beginning to become quite **melancholy** living there. I just felt like I couldn’t do enough or do things to her satisfaction. Add on to that your dad struggling to find work, and it was a sad time for me,” she explained.

“I know it was a difficult **ordeal** for you and Dad being without a job and losing the house. But I really enjoyed spending the time with Grandma. I learned a lot, and we got to know each other better. Before our stay there, I always thought she was a bit stuffy, with her **regal** bearing and formal attire. But I learned that she is a whole lot of fun and not stuffy or imperial at all.

“I’m glad you were able to spend time with her. She had begun to **flounder** a bit after your grandpa died. She really didn’t know what to do with herself. She had no direction or goals. The only person who needed her was your dad’s brother, Uncle Joe, and he just mistreated her, always asking for another handout. I think she was feeling **downtrodden** with no one there to lift her spirits. Your being there seemed to revive her. She seems much more like herself now.”

“I think you’re giving me too much credit, Mom! How much influence could a **puny**, little guy like me have on an adult? Sheesh!” Brian’s face began to turn all shades of red. He was feeling a little embarrassed by his mother’s praise.

Brian’s mom didn’t want to **quibble** over how much influence he had on his grandmother, but she did want him to know that his interest in and kindness to his grandmother went a long way to **accelerate** her rate of recovery from depression after her husband died.

“Brian, you could have acted as a **bystander** in your grandmother’s life, but instead you actively engaged with her. Your interest in her helped to **ratify** her belief that maybe she did have more to offer in this world, that maybe she still had purpose. Watching your zest for life **enticed** her to look at her own life and make some changes.”

“You don’t know that, Mom,” Brian exclaimed.

“Let me give you a **graphic** example of exactly what I’m talking about. Perhaps it will help you see that you most definitely had an influence.”

Brian’s mom went on to frame the story of Brian and Zach’s business venture over the summer where they made and sold food to the pool patrons because the regular snack shack had been closed down. She explained that their enthusiasm for the project, their willingness to **canvass** the neighborhood for customers and orders, and their perseverance really inspired his grandmother to get involved.

“Plus the fact that you really listened to her ideas and followed her advice. You made her feel useful and valuable again. It was just the spark that she so desperately needed. Brian, you did that, no one else. And, your father and I are both thankful for that. You are a special boy,” Brian’s mom concluded.

“Aw, Mom,” Brian sputtered through his tears and sniffling.

Then he shook his head, smiled, and turned to his mom. “Can I have some more orange juice, please? All of this talking and crying has left me absolutely **parched**!”

 ---Ronald Powers

**UNIT 9 VOCABULARY**

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| **word** | **DEFINITION in your own words from context clues** | **MEMORY TRIGGER** |
| vital |  |  |
| casual |  |  |
| stifle |  |  |
| persist |  |  |
| gruesome |  |  |
| erode |  |  |
| melancholy |  |  |
| ordeal |  |  |
| regal |  |  |
| flounder |  |  |
| downtrodden |  |  |
| puny |  |  |
| quibble |  |  |
| accelerate |  |  |
| bystander |  |  |
| ratify |  |  |
| entice |  |  |
| graphic |  |  |
| canvass |  |  |
| parched |  |  |