

## Memories of My Father/The Summer of Love

Summer 1967 – fifty years ago exactly. It was the Summer of Love. Even in Omaha, Nebraska, as a 14-yr-old, I was listening to *Happy Together* by the Turtles, *Let's Live for Today* by the Grass Roots, and *Kind of a Drag* by the Buckingham.

Summer 1967 - my father went into the hospital for exploratory surgery to try to figure out what had been causing him unbearable pain for much of the past five months. He never came out. On the afternoon of July 10<sup>th</sup>, it was a Monday, he died on the operating table. One of my mother's cousins found my sister and me and told us that our father had died. That moment is seared in my mind forever. And it changed my life going forward. I had acquaintances whose parent had died but I couldn't imagine such a tragedy in my own life. I guess I felt secure in having two young-ish, healthy parents. But all that changed on a hot July afternoon.

My memories of my father are those of a child. When I picture my father, I see a tall, thin, dark-haired man with a pronounced bald spot. He was quiet, rarely raising his voice. Amazingly, I don't remember him and my mother ever arguing! I do, however, remember tender moments between them.

With his children, he was very strict. More than once I was on the receiving end of his hand. One time, particularly, stands out – I had made a stink about not being able to attend a friend's bowling party because it was on a Saturday morning. He said little girls should be in synagogue on Saturday mornings, and not at parties.

Every Friday night and Saturday morning, we went to synagogue. In those days, there were no seatbelt laws, and anybody who needed a ride, my father picked up. It was amazing how many people we could squeeze into that Chevy! On Saturday afternoons, the radio in our living room was always tuned to the opera live from the Met. He believed in Shabbas naps and always tried to cajole me into taking one with him.

I remember watching him shave - contorting his face in the mirror as he swiped the shave cream. I remember sitting on the front porch, waiting for him to come home from work. When I was sick in the middle of the night, he held me.

I remember holding his hand as I walked into the Pacific Ocean, for the very first time. I remember him playing the violin. I love that I see his angular features and quiet humor in both my brother's, and in my son's faces. I felt my dad was infallible. And I felt very safe as long as he was nearby.

As a child, I used to say the sh'ma every night when I got into bed. I said it the night before his exploratory surgery, and then poured out my heart to a God I hoped was listening and would heal my father. God didn't, and I stopped praying.

By the time I got home the day he died, there was a small crowd of people in our living room. My mother was composed and said something about this being for the best, blah, blah blah. The next thing I knew, it was two days later, we were all at our synagogue, and the rabbi was pinning torn black ribbons onto us. It was the only time, up to this day, that I ever saw my older brother cry. We buried my father, we sat shiva, my brother returned to his job at camp, and my mother, my sister and I went to services every night to recite kaddish.

What my family didn't do was talk about the seismic shift that had just occurred in our lives. We didn't know the therapeutic benefits of grieving out loud. I had a best friend, but didn't even share my feelings with her. Our lives went on. But, I felt that from then on, I never took off that torn black ribbon.

I went on to college, far away in New York, happy in a way, to leave my former life and memories of my childhood trauma behind. I worked hard in school, made new friends, and met my husband. I went back home on vacations and in the summers, and we went back as our family grew, but it wasn't like living there.

Fast forward to my late thirties, when I started getting terrible headaches which turned into a sustained bout of anxiety. When my internist could no longer help me with any headache medications, he suggested a therapist. And thus began my efforts to deal, at last, with my father's death and to finally remove that black ribbon. The first month of sessions, I don't think I got any real words out – I just cried. My therapist knew to have lots of tissue boxes for me.

I started from the beginning – the night the ambulance came for my father and I woke up but was too afraid to get out of bed. The doctor saying it was a bleeding ulcer and all he had to do was change his diet. The days my father spent

in pain on the sofa, later in his bed. The days he felt better and we thought we were heading out of this prolonged nightmare. And then the return of the pain and an attempt to find an answer in the operating room that July day.

Not only did I learn, in those tearful days of therapy, to be able to talk about my father without crying, but I learned to think of him with a more analytical eye. I discovered that he was fallible and I was learning to tolerate criticism of him. I started to discriminate the positive from the negative. A parent then myself, I could critique some of his actions and behavior and realize they weren't what I would emulate as a mother.

A couple of months ago, when I told Rabbi Bronstein that I would like an aliyah to honor my father's 50<sup>th</sup> yartzheit, he said, "Wow, 50 years, that's a lifetime." And he was right. It is many lifetimes. Not only did my father miss the adult lives of his three children, but he never met their spouses, his eight grandchildren and their spouses, and his 14 great grandchildren (as of this reading).

When I came up for that Aliyah this past summer, the rabbi said that none of my Bet Am Shalom community had the opportunity to know my dad, but in essence they did, because he was present in my eyes and in my actions. His memory has been a blessing for me and I hope I continue to honor his memory with my life.