

Happy Fathers' Day - 2009



He looked up from his lunch, smiled and said: “I did keep you out of the factories.” The thought had registered as deeply as I had hoped. The words had become Poppa’s. I continued to enjoy my lunch and the moments with my soon to be 93 year old father.

I had driven to Detroit to thank my father, to acknowledge my own growth and our mutual successes. I wanted him to know that his hours of quizzing me for organic and inorganic chemistry and Latin had led me into a life of teaching and writing and great happiness.

He had forgotten I was coming. Even when I called from the car to say traffic was heavy and I would be a half hour late, it didn’t all register. At 93 some things stay in the mind longer than others. The

past may be more vivid than the present. I know and accept this reality.

At his home before lunch, Poppa asked if I had come to Detroit for a funeral or lecture. I smiled and said: “Poppa I have come to thank you and to take you to lunch.” “For what?” he replied. “I want to thank you for guiding me, Poppa. I’m 67 years old, healthy, happy, successful in all the important ways...and I want to thank you. You encouraged me and you helped me to see there was a better path for me; the one that had not been open to you.”

At age 93 schedules and routines are very important to my father. They are increasingly important to me, too. He had arranged to have his hair cut at 2:00 with his 88 year old brother. As we finished lunch I asked: “Is your barber near by? I could take you while I’m here.” Poppa thanked me and replied: “I’ll call George when we get home. We can still go together.” I knew my offer had been heard and appreciated but there is a pattern, even a ritual between the two remaining brothers, and it needed to be recognized and respected. We went back to Poppa’s place, talked for awhile and I left. There was still time for him to call George and to go to the barber.

On the ride home I thought about stopping at one or two specialty stores to purchase items I can't find in Grand Rapids. But, as I approached the stores, I chose to pass them. Their wares were tempting, but not necessary. I felt filled and content, heard and understood. It was time to go home.

Pavarotti and Vivaldi would accompany me on my return, and I would share my day with Shirley at the Shabbat table. In my evening prayers I thanked God for the opportunity to share my gratitude with my father. I think God smiled.



Questions for Reflection:

Can you write down the names of some of the people who helped you become the person you are today?

Can you write down one or two life-lessons learned from your father/mother?