

My Dad

My Dad always signed his letters and cards to us, Ol' Pa, man with ideas. And he certainly was a man with overflowing ideas. With all the extraordinary accomplishment of his life, even he could never keep up with the bounty of his ideas that lasted till his last days.

When his book *The Aftermath* was published, I added "author" to "man with ideas." But actually my father was writing books long before then. The first one I remember was a delightful book he made for me with photographs, and picture he collected and drew, which I looked at for hours of my childhood, enthralled and excited by the places they took me. He drew an alphabet too, made of dancers in various positions to form the letters. I showed the book to Toben, his grandson, when Toben was small, and he too was enthralled. Now Toben often writes his own fancy letters in the kind of figures my farther drew.

My Dad loved to put his son, my brother Michael, on his feet when he was small, and bounce him up and down, doing acrobatics in the air, laughing until they couldn't laugh anymore. Michael has inherited my Dads memory, which I envy, and his rich vocabulary of descriptions of people and events.

My Dad loved to discuss art and religion with his son-in-law Abbey, and they would often talk for hours together. The best audience for his jokes, though, was his first son-in-law Don, who remembers his favourites still.

When I was little my Dad took me every Saturday to the movies. We had little money then, my parents had immigrated to the United States with just what they earned after the war, with no relatives to help them and no friends here. So we rushed to arrive at the movies before five, to get the matinee price. He planted the seeds of my life's work on those Saturdays, as he planted the seeds of the person I have become. On the way home I would hide in the entrances to the shops and he would pretend to be surprised when I leapt out. When I was smaller he delighted me, and later my brother and his friends with his monster antics and his scary monster voice. Years later he had Toben roaring with delight when he played the same games with him.

My Dad loved to tell stories of his family before the war. I am just like his mother Cesia (Sesha), he would say. He loved and admired his mother, her beautiful smile, her whole being which exuded warmth and inspired confidence in everyone who met her. He loved his father, who was a writer and philosopher. My Dad inherited his father's handsome, thoughtful face, and expressive eyes, his love of ideas, literature and art, and his mother's loves of enterprise, her charm, her energy and her special gift for understanding people.

My Dad inherited his brother Maurice's sense of humour and imagination. Maurice once convinced my Dad and my Dad's twin sister, Eda to be his personal valets. My Dad would help him with his overcoat each day, and she would open the door, until they finally realized they weren't going to get anything in return. But they couldn't stay mad at Maurice for long, because he had a heart of gold and an irresistible charm.

When he was sixteen my Dad's parents gave him a bookcase filled with books. He read each one, starting with his beloved poet, Heinrich Heine. My Dad wrote many poems of his own. One was about the four most beautiful words in the English language, Tenderness, Compassion, Friendship and Love. The poems he wrote saved him in the camps and gave him a great deal of pleasure throughout his life. He wrote poems that were published, and when he was in the hospital he wrote poems to Lydia, to Michael, Toben, Abbey and I, to Basha who gave him such loving care, and each of his favourite nurses and doctors. It gave us all a great deal of pleasure, too.

My Dad loved to sing and dance. Abbey and I made a compilation of his favourite songs which he listened to over the years. When he could hardly stand, he had a dance with his young friend Andrea to one of the songs. It was a glorious dance. He was very proud of winning a Tango competition in Warsaw before the war, when he was a vital young man. He loved Flamenco too, and had a great time dancing Flamenco with an accomplished dancer at his 85th birthday party at our home in Montreal. My Dad loved film and painting, too. He painted for many years and decided to study film here in Chicago after work, when he was already in his 80's. His energy and passion were remarkable.

My Dad loved jokes and told them every day. He was his own best audience because he couldn't stop laughing at his own jokes, good or bad. Through all the trials and tears, my family's life was full of love and warmth and humour. Most every day, there was laughter in our home.

My Dad loved languages and spoke many. He loved to know them because he could speak to people in the many travels he and my Mom took to other countries around the world. He loved to talk to artists and every kind of person of high and low station, but he seemed to love to joke with the common man most of all. I remember us sitting at his favourite restaurant in Montreal, the Mazurka. A couple was looking in the window, trying to decide whether to come in. My Dad gave them a much embellished OK sign with a big grin on his face and another sign of a satisfied tummy. They came in right away. My Dad always made a special point to talk to people who were alone, to cheer them or lend them an ear.

My Dad loved books. He would go to the library every Saturday and borrow several he would read that week. He wrote books too, and his choices of subjects reveal his passions: When he passed away, he was working on two books, one about *Heroic Rebels* and another about *Emotions in Animals*. My Dad was a devoted and beloved friend of many, some of whom he celebrated in his book *Friends*. His greatest desire was to express in words the joy his friends had given him. "Sometimes at night," he said, "I see them, and hear them speak to me. I long to tell them so they will know, 'I love you and keep the memory of you in my heart.'" Some of his friends are here, many have died."

My Dad was a feminist who celebrated the lives of women in his book *The Most Interesting Women of All Times*. He wrote *The People of the Book* about our Jewish heritage and *Violins and Flutes* about tenderness and passion. My Dad was a Survivor who wrote his greatest book, *The Aftermath: a Survivors Odyssey Through War-Torn Europe* about his search for my Mom after the war. Out of so much hatred, he wrote a story of love.

My Dad and my Mom are heroes. They survived the Holocaust not because they watched out only for themselves, but because they helped others and because others helped them. My Mom saved my Dad's life and his limb at risk of her own, and saved him again many times these last months. My brother, too, saved his life in my Dad's last months. It was my Dad's extraordinary love of life and my mom's exquisite care of him that allowed him to work till he was 85, and continue to write and live in dignity until he was 94.

In the concentration camps my Dad risked his life to save his friend Marek, who was sure to die without an antibiotic. My Dad, beaten by a Kapo, drained by hunger, work and relentless rain, was sure that it was his own turn to go, but dragged himself through the next two days to find and deliver the life-saving pills to his friend. Marek lived, thanks to my Dad, and Marek willed my Dad to live, too. Gradually my Dad's own will to survive returned. Of the thousand men in their group to arrive at Dautmergen, they were among the only forty to survive. Of my Dad's family and my Mom's, they were the only two. When they were reunited, they rebuilt their lives with humanity, love and hope, and rebuilt a new family for Michael and me with many of you here. You became our aunts and uncles, cousins and friends.

Love is the legacy my Dad gave me - love for all people of goodwill, as his mother used to say in her Friday night prayers for Shabbat. Love for his friends, his son-in-law, his son, for me and for his wife. So much love.

My Dad's love, humanity, kindness, and compassion inspired many people of many cultures and faiths, young and old. School children read *The Aftermath* or heard him speak, and wrote him scores of letters about how inspired they were by his courage and humanity. A young Turkish Muslim and her husband wrote him. "You reminded us that we must celebrate life at any age, anywhere, with anybody. We share the same air, same earth and maybe in a way we share a big soul together."

On his 85th birthday in Montreal, my Dad wrote a story about a dream he had. He saw himself ascending a very tall ladder. The angel Gabriel told him to go back, because he did not belong there yet. But before he went back, Gabriel promised a gift to take back to Earth which would make his greatest dream come true. My Dad had to choose between six rings, each with a different gem representing the gift the ring would bear. Money, Beauty, Creativity, Health and Peace of Mind were the first offerings. My Dad was tempted by each of them, but when he saw the pearl, he knew it was the greatest gift of them all. "Yes!" he exclaimed. "I have found it." This was the ring I wanted. One can have all the advantages of the other rings, but life without love and friendship is meaningless, devoid of everything that stirs the heart. Happy are people who share their life with others, who have warm relationships, who are married to a true friend. All other blessings pale in comparison to the gift of love and friendship.

It was the pearl he chose, like the necklace of pearls he bartered for one rainy day in the Vaivara camp in Estonia. He hid the necklace in a hole in his shoes along with a precious picture of his parents. Every day in the camps he dreamed of giving the pearls to Lydia, if they found each other alive after the war. He imagined the pearls gleaming around Lydia's lovely neck as they danced.

My Dad would love to be here with all of us today. He loved to gather us all to celebrate life

together. He would tell us a few jokes, perhaps dance again with my Mom, perhaps sing or recite a poem in any one of many languages. Will there ever be a man like him again?

All of your family and friends here today and all those who have called from far away places, we will always miss you Ol' Pa and we will all always hold you in our hearts. But no one will ever fill the place of your love and friendship, of your grandeur and grace.

Now you are in the embrace of all those you love who passed before you: Max and Cecia, Maurice and Helenka, Eda and Simon and little Misia, Joseph and Francia, Angela, Bernard, Mario, Marek, Geniek, Jerry, Henryk, and Ignas.

I love you Dad. I miss you so much. I would give anything for one more smile, one more hug. I would love to sing a chorus of *Summertime*, together, or *Yerushalayem* or *Those Were the Days My Friend*. But if I am crying for you now, I will soon also sing your songs, and in all my years my soul will sing your songs and, for you, louder sing.

Latchekoham. .Zie Gezunt Dad.

Irene Lilienheim Angelico, Glencoe, December 16, 2002