

## LESSONS FROM DAD

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My father's urbanity belied the paucity of formal schooling he'd received. To his innate loquacity, his professional exploits – years as a Jersey Shore kitchen gadget pitchman, financial gains from selling such products in Macy's basement, "glass knife" proceeds from his concession stands at the 1939-1940 World Fair, the pioneering of injection molded plastic dollhouse furniture, and the invention of the "Visible Man" and other hobby kit products – added an aura of conviction born of career success. Thus it was that when Dad spoke, I usually listened.

So exactly what did I learn from Irving Rosenbloom? Among other things, his delight in word play. His pitchman years had provided him with a generous store of aphorisms like "don't be backward in coming forward" and his allusions to one of a married couple as "the party of the first part" (it was years before I realized that he'd probably read a lot of legal documents during his business day). He'd reject what he believed to be a bad idea by saying "Ring Up – No Sale" and would describe a very tall man by remarking "When he falls down, he's halfway home". These never failed to bring a grin to my face. I was about ten when Dad taught me my first double entendre. "When I was young" he said "I bought a Whippet Motor car in such poor shape that you had to whip it, to make it go." I convulsed in paroxysms of laughter.

Another thing Dad taught me was a love of sports. I saw my first Brooklyn Dodger game in the early spring of 1942, an event that a sore throat almost prevented. Dad persuaded my mother that a muffler and Sucrets would forestall any serious illness and the next thing I knew I was in Ebbets Field. I'm old enough to remember that same Ebbets Field as the place to which Dad took me to see the Brooklyn Football Dodgers play in an era when football player nicknames like "Bruiser" Kinnard and "Toughie" Lehmans were all the rage. We also went to boxing matches, from the small time fighters at McArthur Stadium in Brooklyn, the guys my father called "ham and egggers" reflecting the size of the fighters purses, to the title bouts at the old Madison Square Garden. But funniest of all was his decision to take underaged me to Aqueduct Racetrack. Drowning in a man sized coat, topped by a fedora stuffed with paper so that it didn't fall over my ears, I could have sworn that the turnstile guard knew exactly what was going on when he smiled and let us in.

For a man so glib, I was surprised that Dad had never lectured me on the birds and the bees. I was fifteen years old and taking high school biology, when he took me aside one night and said, "I know you're taking biology so I assume you know about the reproductive process. But let me tell you one thing young man – when you make love, be sure that your partner enjoys it as much as you do." Over the years I've reflected on that statement and concluded that if a parent's going to give a son one piece of advice on sex, that's about as good as it gets. He also taught me to walk a particular kind of line – to be neither an abuser of others nor allow myself to be abused by them.

Dad (and Mom too) indulged my every wish for study of the sort they'd never had, never asking what practical value there might be from a summer at Oxford, an MA in Political Science, a morocco bound set of the *Lives of the Lord Chancellors of England*, (1864 Edition) that I still leaf through, or why I needed a perpetual subscription to the *Political Science Quarterly* that still arrives, as it has through countless address changes over the past 51 years. I need hardly explain who I think of when I open each package. It was from them that I began to fathom what it might be like to be a lifetime learner.

Dad wasn't a great shul goer, having experienced too many growing up years having had his questions about Judaism answered by the phrase "*es iz azei geschribert*" ("that's how the text is written"), although he served several terms as a Trustee of Temple Israel of Great Neck. His skepticism on traditional Judaism notwithstanding, a couple of highlight moments with him continue to inform my Jewish identity. It was 1948, and Israel had beaten back its Arab attackers. Dad and I were taking a walk, a favorite pastime of ours, when he said to me "You know son, Israel's victory will change forever the Jew's self image not just in Israel, but

everywhere Jews live. We've proven that we can defend ourselves as well as being successful in business and professional life. I often think about that observation when I attend AIPAC meetings. Perhaps the most profoundly Jewish experience I had with Dad took place when we stood for the "Unetane Tokef" prayer one Rosh Hashanah. Dad instructed me that years back, in a little Asbury Park shul, his father had told him to listen carefully to this important prayer and that in the Brooklyn synagogues in which we found ourselves he was telling me to do the same thing. A generation later, in a Great Neck synagogue, I told my kids that my Dad's father had told him to be attentive to the prayer, that my Dad had told it to me and I was now telling it to them. Recently, five generations from inception, my grandkids received the same message. Some time ago I was recounting this story to a group and was asked which was more important to me, the substance of the Unetana Tokef prayer or the generational link – a tough choice, but probably for me, the "dor v`dor" moments caused the medium in that instance, to trump the message.

It's said that the past is prologue, and as I approach the epilogue, I smile with pleasure at those lessons from long ago – those lessons from Dad.