

By Sheldon Jacobson

When I was a boy, my father was my hero. He could do nothing wrong. What he said was always right, and what he did had no fault. At night, when my father would make his nightly rounds, saying good night to each of his children, I, the only boy of three, was the last to be visited by him and received the most time and attention. These times still stick in my mind, after more than 50 years.

As I grew older, my inner conflicts erupted into new perspectives of the world, including my relationship with my father. He was a hardworking man who left college to run his family's business. With each passing year, our long discussions on life slowed and then stopped. We grew apart. He could not understand how I was changing, and I could not understand how he could stay the same.

As the years passed, his business continued to struggle. He associated business failure with an inability to provide for his family, something abhorrent to him. Eventually, he could no longer manage it. The solution was to close it down, forcing my father into early retirement. Though he received job offers, he found reasons to not accept any of them. My father had never worked for anyone and was not prepared to learn how to at this stage in his life.

It was then that I became the head of the family. He had been given this scepter more than 35 years earlier, and he relinquished it with great pain. It remained a challenge to walk the fine line between getting the job at hand done and allowing him to maintain whatever self-respect he still had. I often failed, resulting in conflicts and disputes.

Within a year, the financial issues were resolved, and some semblance of stability was



Sheldon Jacobson's father, Morris, sometime between the late 1950s and early 1960s. **FAMILY PHOTO**

reached. Although my father weathered the closing of his business, he struggled with the transition. He had taken over its leadership when his mother had pleaded with him to do so; his own father had become too ill to run it. He did not want me to do what he felt obligated to do. He encouraged my successes in school, watching me graduate from college and graduate school. I lived the life he had wanted for himself. He was a source of great encouragement throughout my studies.

My father always said he felt cheated at not having more time with his parents. (They both passed away before he was 30.) He would say that I would under-

stand this after he was gone, but I would shrug off his comments. I did not need him, in any tangible way. I was incapable of understanding his words.

In the mid-1980s, I initiated a conversation with my father, explaining to him how we were different and how we could live together in harmony, even with our many differences. That discussion brought down many of our barriers. It was also clear that there would come a day when he would not be around to have such an exchange.

In April 1993, my father was scheduled for some minor surgery. The surgery revealed terminal cancer, leaving him but a few short weeks to live. Having

traveled home, I remember seeing him in the hospital emergency room, his skin yellow with jaundice. He was not the strong force I remembered him to be. He was a sick, fragile man, dying from a disease that was quickly depleting his strength and will.

I remember sitting with him in his home, just holding his hand while he spoke about pensions and benefits for my mother. "If anything happens to me," he said, and how he held back those words, his tears reflecting what he knew was inevitable. We hugged when I left, and I told him that I loved him. It was the last time I saw him alive.

I remember touching his lips, as he lay in his casket, before he was

buried. The memory of his funeral remains with me as if it were yesterday.

Thirty years have passed since my father's death. I now live in a new city, married to a wonderful woman he never had the pleasure to meet and know. We buried my mother almost 14 years ago. I have experienced many personal and professional successes over the past three decades. And yes, I miss my father greatly. He was right. There are certain things that one only understands after one experiences them.

I was also right, that I did not need my father for anything tangible. However, there are many intangible things that are missing.

When my father died, I lost my greatest fan. When I received professional accolades, he was the person I most wanted to share it with. He was the person whose smile gave me the extra impetus to go the extra mile. His death left an intangible void in my life. I am grateful to be able to reflect back on many fond memories.

He was not the demigod I thought him to be in my childhood. He was not the obstinate oppressor I imagined him to be during my adolescence. He was a man who did the best he could. I still see him in my dreams. He looks as well as he ever did, though I seem to know that he is no longer here. At times, I still feel his presence and know that he continues to cheer me on.

Just because I cannot hear his applause does not mean that he does not remain my biggest fan.

Dad, I miss you and love you and want to let you know, that yes, you were right.

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