

My Father

My father was a man of few words. A strong disciplinarian, he carried himself with an air of authority, yet he also spent long moments of silent gentleness with us as children. Only five foot two, his demeanor seemed to add another foot of height when I was in his presence. In truth, I never realized how short he really was until, at age twelve, I saw that we were standing shoulder to shoulder at the stove, where he was teaching me how to stuff a turkey.

Portly, with blond curly hair and blue eyes he would have been strikingly handsome at five foot ten. Since my mother was five foot one in height, his handsomeness was visually equaled by her cuteness and charm. I saw Daddy, like my three siblings, a brother and two sisters, as PaPa, the man of the house who had the final say in the matters of our lives.

I don't remember long conversations with Dad. He puttered around the house when he wasn't at work, making repairs to keep our depression family in good order, whole and functioning as efficiently as possible. When I felt alone, distressed or angry, I automatically sought him out, most probably, in the cellar, sawing a board to mend a cabinet door or cutting out a piece of leather to make a new sole for someone's shoes to get through the summer, long enough to reach the day when we would go to the city to buy new shoes for school.

Dad always seemed to know why I appeared in the cellar. It always began with, "Hold this!" .As he directed, I grasped the end of the leather sole. Dad cut it with a sharp knife to fit the shape of the bottom of the shoe. Glued and tacked with a few brads, he proceeded to carefully tap the edges of the sole all around, with small nails. As he worked he gently asked. "Why aren't you outside?"

I blurted my answer with a tone of anger. "Jenny won't play with me!"

"Let her be." He would reply. " She'll miss you in a couple of days and will come looking for you. Work with me for today!"

I smiled at the idea that my friend would, at last, come looking for me in pursuit of my friendship. Consoled, I felt much better. Once again, Dad's wisdom gave me a whole new perspective on my dilemma. So Dad and I "worked" for a couple of hours, saying little except what was necessary, finishing our time together by painting a repaired wooden wagon in bright red enamel splashes that I streaked here and there on an old carpenter's apron I wore to protect my Mama crafted homemade summer shorts.

A quick kiss on the cheek ended my self-pity hour where Dad taught me how to close the book on issues that stressed my life with few words only to be replaced by those with many acts of "doing" that worked off my frustration. Years later, I thanked Papa again and again, in my soul for teaching me how to become strong with well chosen words and meaningful deeds.