

My Dad ~ A Constellation of a Man

When they handed out Dad's, I won the lottery! An awesome man, he was my mentor and friend, teaching me the joy of reading and listening, of adventures and quiet times...reflecting. Dad taught me to swim, took me hiking and taught me how to calculate how far away lightening storms were. He knew Cassiopeia and the archer and all the constellations that studded the sky.

I was the only daughter in a family of four sons, so I was rough 'n tumble and grew up believing I could do anything...just like my brothers. There was a delicious innocence to my childhood. I played a mean game of baseball, and I could hang by my toes on the jungle gym and skip rope better and longer than anyone. Happy years passed by while I excelled. I was good at everything: school, chess and sports, music, reading and writing, scouts, cooking, football, piano, basketball and ballet. Empowered by the man in my young life, I could do anything!

My family spent summers at a lakeside cabin in the Caribou wilderness. At dawn Dad would ring the bell, challenging us to rush into the frigid waters. Racing to the shore with Dad, we'd jump in and swim until our teeth stopped chattering. I learned a few things in Dad's Polar Bear Club, like how to dive in headfirst, take risks, meet life's challenges, be brave.

I loved my dad's office up the circular stairway in the 'great house' on campus. I loved its views, how it smelled, how neat it was and how whenever I was there I was daddy's little girl and got all his attention. I have had offices I loved almost as much, but they never had that magic. Once in the late eighties Dad visited Hawaii, hung around my office every day, flirting with my secretary and chatting with the agents. He'd poke his head in saying, "How's my girl? Ready for lunch?" Dad wore his pride in me like his service medals. Wow, you run a successful business AND raise great kids! He didn't say it quite that way, but I felt his deep admiration.

Other than being the breadwinners of our respective families, our closest connection was a mutual appreciation of the peace and beauty of nature that nourish souls. We read Whitman together and Thoreau and Muir. We'd sit in the late afternoon sun, listening to wind in the pines, reading or just hanging out. At night, we'd stargaze. Our quiet moments were so intimate...and huge.

The last summer I saw Dad at the cabin, he came at dawn to my bed, waking me gently. "Wanna catch the sun?" he asked softly. We sauntered, arm in arm, down the path to the lake and stood there, awed, as pink, purple and mango colors rippled across the water and onto the cliff, while we warmed ourselves quietly in the morning sun. It had served us well, but we had both outgrown the Polar Bear Club.

My last visit to that magical place, was to celebrate my Dad's life. Following a tear-filled service, I took some ashes and walked down to the shoreline, paddling off in the red canoe. I left him there on Green Island where he had first taken me decades before. It was one of those places I loved more because we had shared it.

Returning home, my friend and angel, Maria, gave me a citrus tree from a Hawaiian kahuna. She planted a tree in her garden whenever anyone close to her died, "then whenever I'm full of feelings, I sit under it and talk to them." A week later, at my grandson's baseball game, I found myself sobbing uncontrollably. "What's wrong, mom", my daughter asked. "I miss him so. It's the finality of never being able to see him again." "Oh, mom," she said. "How can you miss him so much? You're half him!" My daughter knows me well.

Later that afternoon I planted Maria's lime tree. Then I scattered a handful of saved ashes ritualistically underneath. My father and I were reunited. He came as a presence, in dreams, in laughter (did I mention his great sense of humor?). He watched over me, protected me, healed me back to joy.

A year later, I made an unplanned move to a small island, far away from family and friends. I left Dad too, there under his tree. Then one day, working in my garden, a sharp branch poked me. Looking up I saw a beautiful lime tree. Since then I have found several, growing wild around my house. Dad found his way all the way to Rarotonga to be with his girl, hangs out in my garden and journeys with me still, pointing out the constellations hanging over paradise.