

Naomi Camper
Everett Eulogy – 4/4/2022

Rabbi Moshe Waldoks is quoted as having said that Everett “was the kind of father you always wanted to have.” I am here to attest that the wise rebbe is correct.

I do, however, feel an obligation to heed Dad’s last wish, about which he was quite serious. As our family spent an uninterrupted week together as Dad’s health declined, he cautioned more than once against the temptation toward idealization that happens so often after a loved one’s departure. “No hagiography!” With that in mind, here is what I can say about having Everett as a father and some of the qualities that stood out to me as a daughter.

Eloquence

Dad had an almost magical way with words. As we sat in the hospital room, I asked Dad some questions that our cousin Emily, who is also his biographer, had passed along. Even as his oxygen waned and his breathing became more labored, Dad not only spoke in perfect sentences but specified punctuation. He would pause, tell me to add a comma or a semicolon, and continue his thought. When I asked him what he hoped people reading about him would glean from his life, he paused and said, **“All that I could do was live my life. What people draw from that living is for them to determine, not for me to prepackage.”** After I read the sentence back to him, he smiled and exclaimed, “Hey, that’s pretty good!”

Humility

It was a delightful surprise to hear Dad say that, because he demonstrated deep humility. As I mentioned, he recoiled at the idea of an “airbrushed” retelling of his life. Just a few weeks ago, I told Dad about an upcoming admitted students event at the University of Chicago with our daughter Alida. Dad has described his experience at UChicago as utterly transformational. After I finished, he said he needed to unburden something that had been weighing on him for almost 70 years. I braced myself. He “confessed” that he was one of two students in his class whose names had appeared in the local paper for graduating with a perfect GPA. Quite the confession, Dad, I deadpanned. “Oy,” he said, “but in my case that really wasn’t accurate.” He went on to explain that he had switched one of his courses to Pass/Fail because of his lackluster performance, so he believed that he did not merit the honor. Either this was the greatest humble brag in history or the most unrelatable example of Imposter Syndrome on record.

Embarrassing

Ok, I need to keep my promise to Dad, so let’s talk about what it was like being an adolescent with Everett and Mary as parents. While I have grown to appreciate their counter-cultural proclivities as I’ve gotten older, I have what I suppose is a recessive conformity gene. Which meant that I did not appreciate having a father who cover-cropped our front lawn with alfalfa so he could count the Omer; I did not appreciate when he put his van up on blocks in the

driveway to conserve his tire life; I did not appreciate him serving super preppy and intimidating Andover students seaweed crackers on Thursday mornings during his classes; and I most especially did not appreciate him wearing his Teva sandals with black socks.

Then there are the seemed-fun-at-the-time but cringey-in-retrospect moments: Like when Dad taught my elementary school class a program on mythology and served *real alcoholic mead* (just a thimble-full!) to second graders. Or when he let Tamar and me ride down from our distant garden **on the VW bus ROOF RACK**. Or when one fine weekend, we heard joyful music coming from a neighbor's yard so Dad suggested we go explore — upon seeing a large white tent, we walked in, greeted the bride and groom with enthusiasm, and enjoyed some delectable strawberry shortcake. [Pause] Mom, I am not forgetting about your role in all this, but the day is not long enough for that.

Humanity

Looking at Dad's resume on paper, one might assume his stints at UChicago, Princeton and Andover would render him an elitist. While breathing that sometimes rarified air allowed him to influence the direction of so many leaders, his deeply-felt and lived egalitarianism is what led him to have such a profound impact on those who encountered him. Dad was a first-gen college student who enjoyed his conversations with the custodial staff as much as with his rabbinical colleagues. Allow me to read one of the most moving Facebook comments from the past few days: "The loss is profound. He was an amazing person and I am very glad to have had the honor and pleasure of getting to know him over the last 12 years at my ticket window at Tanglewood. May his memory be an everlasting blessing." Dad's love of Tanglewood was not just about the ethereal music and bougie picnics, but for the entire experience — why download a concert pass when you could go to a ticket window and connect with people!

Acceptance

This fundamental respect for different life choices extended to his own daughter. While I got Dad's curly hair and his "distinguished" nose, I'm not sure I got my fair share of his spiritual elements. In any case, after I meandered into a career in the banking industry, Dad began reading the Wall Street Journal so he could understand more. Even during the depths of the financial crisis when I was working at JPMorgan Chase, he found a way to be proud of the work I did and affirm my life choices. "Ah, that James Dimon — he seems like quite a fine fellow!" And with our next generation, Dad also — intuitively and deeply — identified what makes each of his grandchildren special, treasuring each of them for their very different natures and paths — even during some turbulent developmental phases.

Standards

But make no mistake, Dad had standards and was anything but a moral relativist. He was just craftier about how he exerted his influence. As a teacher of strategic non-violence, Dad had both an intellectual and intuitive understanding of how to make change. Sometimes it was direct and loud action: like marching and going to jail. Or taking his young children to chain themselves to the Seabrook nuclear power plant (maybe this belongs in the cringey category. . .

). Or slyly expressing respectful disagreement as part of a prayer welcoming then-Vice President George H.W. Bush back to the Andover campus.

He did not shy away from controversial positions. As a result, although he had so many admirers, he also had strong detractors. I will never forget our fear and frankly disbelief when someone punctured our car's tires in our driveway after Dad wrote a letter to the Boston Globe in support of Vanessa Redgrave during her dispute with his beloved Boston Symphony Orchestra over Middle Eastern politics. Or when an ultra-Orthodox group performed an ex-communication ceremony — at the Tewksbury Holiday Inn no less — I suppose to de-rabbify Dad. He did not relish conflict, yet he did not shy away from it either. Rather, he engaged in his own peaceful but fierce way.

More than anything, Dad relished engaging with humanity and delighted in the world around him, reveling in the mystery of it all. While some of us (ahem!) embraced the excuse for relative isolation that the pandemic allowed, Dad just wanted to be connected to people: to learn about them, to garden with them, to listen to music with them, to pray with them. While he would not have liked being the focus of attention today, boy would he have loved to see all of you. We are profoundly grateful that while Dad was still healthy, we hosted several joyous celebrations: big birthdays, an Andover JSU reunion, and countless family simchas.

Although we believe that towards the end he accepted (though was clearly surprised) that it was his time, he really wasn't ready to leave. Despite extremely low oxygen levels, he held tight to his precious life long enough to make it to Rosh Chodesh Shabbat for Nisan, the month of renewal and the month of Pesach. Dad always loved Passover... in part because it gave him an excuse for a really really long service. After all, "Blessed are those who linger in the retelling."

We were so blessed to have Everett for 93 years, but that was not nearly long enough. So let us all linger in the retelling of this amazing life, and let each of us glean from it the seeds of inspiration that will guide our own life's pursuits. Dad may not have prepackaged what his life should mean to us, but he certainly lit the way.

Zecher tzadik livracha