

On The Death of my Father

The Eagles' "Take It Easy" was playing the first time my parents took me to meet my uncle. I didn't see him again till years later when he was sitting in our case worker's office and I was asked who he was. I thought he was my dad.

My dad had many great traits. He taught me to play chess, and I still remember the first time I legitimately beat him. He had a way of making me feel special, drawing me into his secrets. He had a way of turning the worst experiences into games. He comforted me in my first loss. He taught me how to swim and he was the family cook. He was smart, an avid reader, the first person I knew with more than a high school diploma, who I joined on "go to work with parent" day, and a man who seemed aware life had passed him by and had accepted it.

His absolute best trait was to make me remember the absolute worst events in the best possible way. Indeed, these are the memories I want to have, and it's memories that are true. The problem is, it's half the story. He drew me into his secrets that while we were living in an abandoned house, he was cheating on my mother. He made gathering aluminum cans by the side of the road to earn money seem like a game when it's how got money for food, and he comforted my loss of my first "job" panhandling for money by offering to pump people's gas. He taught me to swim by throwing coins in the deep end when I wanted a drink, and he may have been the cook but the food was often donated from shelters or churches.

My uncle was in our caseworker's office because my father had put us into a children's home. My uncle was there to step in, and began taking us once a month into his own home. I would not be where I am today without my uncle.

Andy, I have fond memories of my father. You have every right to mourn his loss. I made my peace with him years ago and think that he did the best he could. You did right by him, even though he didn't make it easy for any of us.

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