

Dreams From My Father

I was only in my father's classroom once. That was at Columbia Law School. To tell you the truth, I wasn't bowled-over. But, then again, sitting in a classroom has never really been my thing: that's not how I learn.

However, reflecting back to that day -- thirty or so years ago -- I've concluded that what my father taught me wasn't what I would have heard in his classroom, not even if I had attended his class many times. Nor was it what he and my mother insisted my siblings and I do: study, respect others -- regardless of circumstance (as Walter has so eloquently reminded us) -- treasure family.

No: what my father taught me to do was to dream, to dream of social justice. And then to fight to achieve it. And he taught it by example.

My father worried constantly -- to the very end of his days. Mostly, it seemed to me, he worried about whether he was smart enough, and whether he had worked hard-enough.

He never really seemed to think he was, or he had. He always thought there was someone else who had done better in school, or had written a better brief, or had made a better speech. Tragically, no amount of public recognition or accolades, no victory for a client, no grateful applause nor successful students ever mitigated that worry, enabling him to rest easy and in comfort knowing he'd done good.

My father most poignantly evidenced this trait to me almost forty years ago --as it happens, just when I was beginning my own professional career.

He and I took the train from Washington, D.C. to New York together, after he'd had an interview -- was it at the White House? -- to be director of the EPA.

As you know, he didn't get that job. On the train afterwards, he expressed his fear that he wouldn't. He also wasn't full of the energy one would need to fight to get such a job. Instead, he shared his feelings of unworthiness, sadly reflecting on the fact that the job probably wouldn't be his. Can I tell you how sad I was?

But, today, I know what I didn't know then. I know -- contrary to what my father fearfully imagined -- that President Carter didn't pick David Sive because he wasn't smart-enough, or well-schooled-enough, or not sufficiently expert in the matters within the purview of the department.

No, President Carter didn't pick David Sive simply because he didn't meet the political parameters at-hand.

As proud as my father was of his accomplishments (it seemed to me he could recite every finding-of-fact in every important brief he ever wrote --until the end of his days; my niece Hannah told me he recited the list of U.S. presidents in order, without pause, just a couple months before he died), paradoxically, his unyielding concern for others, combined with his self-doubt, meant he lost -- on that occasion -- as well as on others. Selflessness and self-doubt are a killer in politics. *No self-doubt* is always the rule of *those* Election Days.

But, no matter: David Sive kept dreaming of making a difference. And fighting to make that difference come true.

He became "the father of environmental law." No one else can make that claim, nor share that mantle. Can I tell you how happy that makes me?

As they say in that Brooklyn neighborhood where my father was born: "that's not chopped-liver."

When David Sive worked to realize his dream, he demonstrated that no dream is worth having that isn't pursued with discipline and fortitude. Actually, I can't think of anyone else I know (and I've had the good fortune to know and work with a lot of hard-working and successful people), who exemplifies *this requisite* of dreams that matter - better than David Sive.

I think I may have understood this quality of my father's by the time I was about thirteen, when I walked with him and Justice Douglas along the Hudson River in order to

bring attention to the importance of saving Storm King.

What a day that was. What thoughts I had, as I trailed a couple steps behind. What energy in pursuit of a dream I witnessed.

Around the time we took that walk along the Hudson, I asked my parents one evening at the dinner table why they weren't in Alabama or Mississippi, marching and registering voters.

My mother pointed-out that she had five children to care for and didn't want (in fact, feared to) leave them. She mentioned Viola Liuzzo's tragic death.

I don't remember my father answering the question. But, now, I've put some facts together, and think I understand *his way* of thinking about that matter of civil rights and equal justice; no, about *his dream* of equal justice.

**During my high school years -- and perhaps for longer -
- my father parked his (notably-humble) car on a side street
in East Harlem and then took the subway to his Park
Avenue office.**

**He wondered, as he once commented to Steve and me,
why *those* East Siders liked to sit on stoops and chat.
Nevertheless, he was with them: he walked and traveled
among them. That's a big and unusual deal for a Park-
Avenue lawyer.**

**For a man who already had his own private nature
preserve --his own mountain-side in the Catskills -- by the
time he was in his thirties, why commit a lifetime, and a life's
work, to preserving public space and natural beauty for
those East-Harlem stoop-sitters?**

For had he wished to, by his forties, my father could have never seen another littered ghetto street, or dirty subway car, or crowded suburban lake or trail, or smog-emitting bus.

Instead, by the time he was fighting to preserve Storm King and the Hudson River, he was giving up countless weekends at that nature preserve of his to fight battles *for those without.*

This working-class Brooklyn boy; this boy who had no role models in his life for what he later became (an amazing achievement I marvel at daily); this man occasionally crippled by his fears and sadness had *this dream*: that equality of opportunity for all, social justice for all, means equal access to the natural world. It is not only for those who have the means to pay for it or to privatize it.

David Sive cherished this dream a lifelong and so deeply because he knew in his heart and mind and soul *just how much* his access to free and open land and natural beauty had meant to him.

David Sive knew he wanted to provide that same experience to others who grow-up in inner cities, don't have much money, and don't have cousins or an uncle and aunt who own a nature preserve.

David Sive taught me that the dream everyone in this room shares -- to preserve nature so that it can be experienced by anyone and everyone-- is a social justice and civil rights cause on a par with any other.

In this year when we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, passed by a president my father greatly

admired, David Sive's dream bears remembering in that context, too.

Several years ago, I read a biography of Michael Harrington, a great hero of mine and the author of *The Other America* (now that I think about it, published around the same time as that walk along the Hudson with Justice Douglas).

Harrington's biographer made a point that has stuck with me ever since. He expressed the view that Harrington failed to realize that charitable work and public service -- notwithstanding their lofty purposes -- aren't sufficient to creating personal happiness; that however much joy one may experience from winning an important lawsuit, or campaigning successfully for a good cause or candidate (or even being that candidate oneself), or furthering an

important policy goal, *that joy isn't sufficient to achieving personal happiness. One must also gather joy from personal experience of *the most visceral sort.**

David Sive knew this, hard as those of you who watched him work so much might find this to believe.

I think this is why he would wander off into "the pines." I think this is why he would hike in all kinds of weather. I think this is why he never wore a hat, or gloves, or a scarf, or even the right jacket: he wanted to experience that visceral human joy by being in and of the natural world.

I brought some flowers with me today. They are daffodils from my garden in Michigan.

Around the time my father became bedridden, I began an ambitious daffodil-planting program. I've now planted

500 or so, and my plan is to keep planting all the way down the hill in front of Steve's and my home, to our lake below, so there is a hillside covered with them.

This field of daffodils is my monument (though that's not a word that resonates with me very much) to David Sive:

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

This William Wordsworth poem my father loved so much evokes that joy--that pure and boundary-less personal joy-- that David Sive found in nature and secured for others in nature. Thank you, Dad.

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