My Father

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Let me begin by quoting from a recently discovered letter that my dad wrote to his father, while serving as a lieutenant in the army in occupied Japan. It was 1946 and he was twenty-two years old. Here, already, he is refusing to acquiesce to social conventions—as if they were somehow eternal truths. I quote:

> There are so many things that I want to do, so many important things I want to read. I want to work with and for minority groups that must be educated to demand what are their natural rights. I might find that working up within the ranks of a labor union might be my method. One thing I do know—that I enjoy myself most when I am working to better the lot of people that haven't found our democracy real. . . . You may feel that this so called idealism will wear off. Honestly I don't think it ever will or can for each day I realize how much there is that must be done.

Later in the letter, he goes on to urge his father, who is in real estate, to "build some comfortable low cost housing units, with the proviso that Negro families and white will be able to participate as tenants."

To an extraordinary degree, my father lived the life of his youthful aspirations. He was very much a man of the Enlightenment who, while not believing in the perfectibility of man in any simplistic sense, encouraged all of us to strive for the highest possible standards in society and in our public and private lives. He was resolute that we not succumb to the inner voice of caution—the cynical realpolitik of limited possibility. He sometimes called people who did succumb "young fogies."

He loved the Yale Law School, New Haven, and all its people. And whether you were an electrician or a professor, a secretary or a student, he treated you with the deepest respect and was always available to offer his counsel. There was no snobbism or caste hubris with him. In Joe Goldstein's universe, there were only unique individuals with special attributes and ideas. You might think of yourself as a conservative or a

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liberal, a libertarian or a communist, but to Joe Goldstein you were never simply a representative of any group, who could be easily and glibly labeled. You were a much more complicated organism than that. You were you.

To his many students here, I want to say something about his teaching life that you may not know. Until the end of his life, he prepared for each and every one of his classes with extraordinary diligence. Teaching you was his art form and every appearance before the class was like opening night at the theatre. And he experienced before each and every performance a case of real stage fright. Would there be a fruitful exchange? What would his critics say? Would he measure up? When a class went well, he relished it; when it went not so well, he agonized—really agonized.

I once had the privilege of sitting in on one of his classes. What struck me most was, of course, his Socratic approach. No assumption about the life or the law was ever a given. But in addition, I noted the formality of his style. Everybody was Mr. or a Ms.—which at first struck me as a bit stuffy. But then I grasped how well this formality served his purposes. This neutrality of address, its calculated blandness, created a perfectly level playing field where the distortions of transference and the allure of the personal were minimized as much as was possible. The quality of the ideas discussed was all that mattered.

But as important as students and colleagues were, we children and later grandchildren always knew that we were front stage and center. And he was unwavering in his support of our right, in fact our duty, "to be ourselves"—as long, of course, as exercising this right did not impinge on the rights of another. For my dad, "being yourself" was the highest calling of any sentient being. And he stood by his children no matter how wrong-headed he might think we were—no matter how grave the concern, no matter what the provocation—and believe me, I gave him great provocation.

When I dropped out of high school in the Vietnam era to plan the revolution, he didn't block the door. It was up to me to make my own destiny—for better or worse, I was going to be myself. He went so far as to authorize an unlimited book allowance for me at the Yale Co-op in case I just might want to continue my studies independently. And when later on I pursued the impossible career of being a playwright, he encouraged and supported this long after any other father would have urged his child to get realistic and go, if you will, to business school or law school. As I speak, one of my plays is being performed in London. This would give him such pleasure or, as he might have said, *naches*. He believed in me and all us children more than we could ever have possibly believed in ourselves.

His relationship with my mother was one of the seven wonders of the world. Their bond was remarkable and enduring. This was truly an

Olympian partnership. It is interesting to me how their professional collaboration really mirrored the changing times. From the beginning of my father's career, my mother always read and edited every page he wrote. At first, the world knew of her handiwork only from the dedication or acknowledgment pages of my father's books. But in later decades, she was elevated to full-fledged collaborator, and taught side by side with him as well.

My parents had the daring and zest to turn the institution of marriage into a lifelong triumph of intimacy and commitment. After the tragic auto accident, my mother heroically looked after my dad at home till the very end.

I want to conclude by quoting from an essay written last spring by Dorothy Goldstein Tegeler, my father's oldest granddaughter. In her essay, Dorothy reflects on her many Augusts in Northport, Maine, where we have gathered as a family for the last twenty-five years—in the house my father built, a house that I always called my father's Monticello. For this teacher and patriarch was a greater builder of homes as well. Dorothy writes:

> I grew up on the juice of blueberry fields and learned to swim in the pond down the long driveway lined with blackberry bushes. I ate my *zaide*'s popovers there and danced around the kitchen singing skip to my lu. This year I am going to drive to Maine again. I will be fourteen and the tradition of going to Maine will be fourteen years old. But will it be the same? My grandfather, my *zaide*, died this year and I find my most trustworthy ritual being jolted. And I wonder what it's going to be like. His study upstairs will seem so empty and there will be no more popovers or Hershey kiss hunts. I don't know whether it will still be the same Maine. I want it to be so badly.

My father Joseph Goldstein taught all of us how to be ourselves. And in the everlasting process of becoming ourselves, we honor his memory. Thank you.

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