

Hesped for Steven Bauer

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My dad was the most naturally elegant man I've ever met. He was dignified and articulate, witty rather than funny, knowledgeable and thoughtful. That he was emotionally vulnerable was something I learned with surprise when I was already well into my adult years. I have some, but very few, memories of his anger, no personal memories of his grieving, many of his amusement and his pleasure, nothing of raucousness or malice. Dad's range of expression held within certain boundaries, but it was very specific and nuanced and responded to the full range of life and the world. He made it through most of 2009, nearly to age 86, but he was a gentleman of the 20th century, with a vocabulary and emotional palette that were the product of his German birth, his British education, his American identity, and his international career.

A couple of words of Dad's:

Simpatico -- meant a demonstration of kindness, decency, someone warm you could warm to, but I always thought that it meant someone like my dad, who was sincere and trustworthy, but not necessarily effusive and never intrusive.

Dad used the word "chum" over the phone and when Evan and I would see him after any absence. "Hello, Chum!" I don't know if it raised even the barest hint of self-consciousness for him, if he was aware that he was the only person I knew who used the word -- that he effectively kept the term alive in my ears. I loved the depth of feeling and the gentleness of the impact -- Dad could express in one charming syllable a fullness of affection that -- as you witness -- takes me a paragraph.

Dad stammered badly as child in Germany. The stammer was occasionally audible in English and it blended with a measure of aphasia in the last year. What generally manifested, though, was an extraordinary, economic elegance of syntax and diction. My guess is that he spoke well to avoid stammering badly. Whatever the cause, thoughts came out beautifully formulated -- he would have had to have crafted the sentences in his head before he began speaking them, because you can't start statements like that if you don't know where you're going to land.

All of this is not to say that he didn't bark a profanity or two ("Oh, shit!" when he would walk into the kitchen and find his family's clutter strewn over the shelf by the phone; and "Elephant piss," which was the best one could say about Piel's Real Draught), but he never waxed profane or wallowed in vulgarity to my knowledge.

I remember certain of Dad's utterances very clearly.

When I had been accepted at both Northwestern and Yale and considered whether to head Northeast or Midwest, Dad, open newspaper in both hands said, "I should think that someone who had the opportunity to attend one of the world's great educational institutions would not turn it down."

A gay college freshman home on Christmas vacation in 1977, I told my parents for the first time -- not that I was gay, they knew that -- that I had a date, needed the car, and desired to bring me and the car home only the following morning. In 1977 it was a not uncontroversial moment. After some heated and emotional conversation, my father said gravely, "If this is in keeping with our family's style of doing things, including our attending the opera, for example, not just a summer camp get-together where you sleep on someone's sofa, then you may go."

Years later a friend of mine dubbed "The family's style of doing things," *the Bauer we*. There were things we did and things we didn't. My mother is very much the co-creator of the family's style, and they shared the values, and I'm not sure whether the concept of a family style originated more with one than with the other. I could be persuaded that the formal structure of the *Bauer we* came from my Dad. In Judaic speak, I see my mother as the primary contributor of passionate *kavannah* -- intention -- and my father as providing the elegant *keva* -- the defining boundaries and the sense that some things fell within the lines and some did not. They would often point to the exact same desire or distinction, but while mom is likelier to say "I think you should do this" or "I think you shouldn't do that," Dad would have been likelier to ask whether one or another course of action was something "one did" or something "one didn't."

Dad's integrity made him uniquely credible. You believed him because you knew he never lied. I never knew my dad to be anything but ethical. I doubt it ever crossed his mind to do otherwise, and he was deeply troubled by other people's lapses in loyalty or ethics. I interviewed dad for Dayle Friedman's Introduction to Aging class at RRC and was able to hear Dad's spontaneous eloquence on the meaning of life and the right way to navigate it. (This is verbatim.) "While you're here, you'd better do something worthwhile for those you wish to help. Make positive contributions. Don't just be a parasite or a weed....Pick your fields of interest and your fights. Something you think is worthwhile, pursue with energy and commitment. Associate with others who may share your values or your views and advocate for them loudly. Don't just be an observer. Be an actor."

Evan and I were spoiled as kids in very classic ways. We were taken to Europe, we did go to the opera and the theatre, sat in good seats, and went to lovely restaurants beforehand. Mom and Dad shared an appreciation of culture rooted in the best of an uncritiqued Western Civilization. We went yearly to the Stratford Festival and often to the Met. Dad from Germany and Mom from Detroit raised Evan and me to think internationally and to reject provincialism. Mom, along with her fascination with the contemporary political moment, loves the old world. Dad embodied it. Nonetheless I learned from them about loving community, loving where you live -- as they did Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, and their new community at the Hill at Whitemarsh.

My father's most reliable appreciation of the world was of food. During the years of his commuting to Switzerland for lunchtime meetings with the World Health Organization, we joked that there was a smile that none of us could conjure onto my dad's face through anything we did; it was reserved for grilled lamb kidneys he'd had at lunch in Zurich on a recent trip. At a Shabbat service I led here in Philadelphia, I remember challenging the congregation to recall an animal sacrifice cooked and eaten whole. I asked if anyone recognized the animal in question. The answer I meant to invoke was the pesach sacrifice. My father called out, "Soft-shell crab?"

Dad cooked wonderful bass and swordfish on our summer vacations on the Vineyard and roasted goose yearly at what my mother considerately started calling the "Holiday" dinner every December, when I got squeamish during rabbinical school about calling it Christmas. He loved Schmitters from McNally's and lobster at the Home Port in Menemsha.

I had one final very personal moment with Dad and one beautiful utterance three years ago. Dad had fallen at Thanksgiving time and unfortunately had to wake up on his 83rd birthday in a rehab facility, where things were loud, alien, and uncomfortable. I took some Gouda cheese out of the refrigerator at home, and went over to sing to him. I had the inspiration that day to sing "Di Provenza" from Traviata rather than Happy Birthday.

I saw a smile on his face I had never seen before. Not one of delight or pleasure. Not the one of great food remembered. I felt as if I'd struck it lucky and found the song that would let him know he was known and loved. He recognized that I knew the song was his, was important to him, was something we shared and that, when I was a child, he had shared with me. It was an ironic choice, actually, an aria sung by a father to his son, promising a better future after unhappiness. The words became my promises of comfort to him, comfort I didn't think I could deliver. I sang an octave down and in an awkward key. Dad smiled as he listened and conducted, seemed to hear echoes of Traviata performances with Merrill at the Met. And at the end, Dad said, "David Bauer, you have a special ability...to bring love."

It was easy to bring love to him, in exchange for the gentle, articulate love he brought to us, in his simpatico way. Hello, Chum.