

YIZKOR (2015)

Last Words

His last words
Are all I've got

Just a bit of chitchat
As he lay dying

Not saying
What we should have said
Not knowing
He would die overnight
All alone
On a cold November night
Long ago
When we should have been
Giving thanks

But late that night
Long after we left the hospital
There were
No more breaths
No more heart beats
No more words
No hugs
No thanks

When we returned
I stared at that flat line
For what seemed an eternity
Wishing I could
Destroy it
Burn a hole
Right down its center
To destroy death itself

To spark back life to
The peaks and valleys
Of his lifetime

But I couldn't

That straight line
No contours
No shades of gray
Nothing to work with
Just a stark
Straight line

A line
That he crossed all alone
Without complaining
Without a single word
And without anyone
Even holding his hand

I still see him

Silenced

Just a moment before
Capable of
Reaching heights
That any poet would envy

But now void of any hint
Of the beauty that
Could be born
In the stroke of his hand

Now and forever
His essence
Knowledge

Feelings
Passion and
Creativity
Trapped in death

Em-es
His initials were MS

Now his truth is locked away
Somewhere
Forever

But where

Where does all that go

Is it just gone
In an instant
Reduced to an
Endless
Impersonal
But
Definitive
Flat line

At least
Until the nurse
Shuts off the monitor

We didn't even get to say good bye

Next Day

I saw him
Once again
Doing my duty
With my sibs

To identify his body

That done
A quiet mortician
Gently closed the lid

I lingered
Near his side
For a while

Touching the closed box
Taking some time
To recall moments
When we sat
Side by side
In silence

The only sound
Turning pages
From his massive library
Our breaths
Synchronized
In harmony
Our lives
In balance

Pipe smoke
Rising to the ceiling
Merging in a cloud
To form
Silent signals

Late in the night
He tapped
My wrist
Time to sleep

Remembrance

Today
More than
40 years later
Sitting quietly
In my own little corner
Trying to slow things down
Trying to make sense of his life
Really trying
To make sense of my life too
Searching
For memories
About times past

Can I at least
Create something
Something to
Hold on to
Something to pass along
From memories of
Times long ago

Sounds

Then
From the muck
Of my grief stricken memory
Came sounds
Slowly
Entering my consciousness
Poking at me
Trying to get my attention
A voice beckoned
And the message began
To come through

Only at this late stage of my life
I recognize and welcome the
Invitation
And respond
Without fear
To step across the line
Into the night
Where I can't see
But can trust
His voice
To guide me
Where to go

Then I felt
His presence
And we hugged
For a very long time

He said that I looked tired

True enough
I was older
And grayer
Than he was
When I last saw him
That sad Thanksgiving night
So many years ago

He took my hand
And told me to
Sit down
Then helped me
To lie down
Close your eyes he said
Get some rest

I don't want to do that

We need to talk

Don't worry
Plenty of time
For that

Then I heard him
Humming the soft tones
Of a familiar song that
I remember
As a child
That often helped me fall to sleep

Shlof mayn scheyner
Shlof mayn kleyner
Shlof mayn zissinker
Shlof Shlof Shlof

I closed my eyes
He gently stroked my hair
And held me close
Humming his tune
Assuring me
He would be there
When I woke

My dad
Whose voice
I had forgotten
After so many years
Was now
Returning
His beautiful sounds
To my memory

Oh God
I could stay here

Forever
Listening to his
Soulful melody
That comforted me
That gave me
The courage
To close my eyes
And rest through the night

Until now
I couldn't hear it any more
Though I wanted
And strained to
But couldn't
As hard as I tried

Over and over
I dreamed
That I was singing
His lullaby
To my own children
To my grandchildren

Now remembering
His voice
As if it were yesterday

He died
More than 40 years ago
When I was so young

Even today
I dream about
Conversations we might have had
Could have and
Should have had

Awakening

I opened my eyes
And found him
Sitting beside me
Just as he promised

I asked
How are you
What is it like

Peaceful
No more pain
That's all he said
Nothing more

Not good enough for me
I didn't believe him

I wanted to know more

I told him how
I realize now that
I've sped through life
And never really took time
To focus on
To absorb and
"collect the everyday
life of feelings, thoughts
and words" [Svetlana Alexievich]

I missed so much
Just like you
Busy doing
So busy doing

Why didn't we

Do more together
Say more to each other

Sure
There were
Silent signals
And feelings
Expressed
By act or deed
Just by
Being together

Like the times together
In the quiet
Of a Sunday afternoon
Doing nothing
That somehow
Was more meaningful
Than everything

All those
Times together
Were
To the good

But in the end
We were just
Too busy
Thinking
There would be
Time enough for more

Even though
We both knew that
Time doesn't always
Cooperate like that

I wanted more
But
I didn't know how
To get it from you
And you didn't
Teach me how

Maybe because you didn't know how

Then we unexpectedly
Ran out of time
That sad day
More than
40 years ago

I know
I know he said
Death
Became my sanctuary
Separating me
From so much pain
So many
Wrong turns

Turning

Then he turned the page
And asked me
About my greatest concern

I told him
That I was already older
Than he was when he died
And that stark reality
Made me realize
That now
In this last segment

Of my life
I probably
Won't be able
To do all
The things I
Would like to do

Maybe there'll be time
But will I have the strength and ability
To break the pattern
To change the course
Start over
Reach out
Touch
Feel
Forgive
Be forgiven

Dad
I need to know
Why is life such a muddle
Why does it take control
Trap you in past mistakes
And leave you so unable
To fix
All that needs
To be fixed

Tell me
I need to know

He turned me around
hugged me
Held me tight
Sighting me
Straight
In the eye

He grasped my shoulders
And whispered

The words
Rushing
Through my entire being

I'm flawed
You're flawed
Who isn't

Focus

The point is that
Even if it sounds trite
We know that
We love each other

Maybe even because of
Our flaws

They make us human

Our flaws are markers
Symptoms of our condition

If we're able to be
Honest with ourselves
Those markers reveal
A path to redemption
A path illuminated
As brightly as the light of any star
Tending toward
Healing
Faith and love

Those are the big needs

Life is the time
To fix
The things that
Need to be fixed

Then He Said

I'm proud of you
Son

I love you dad

I know I'm flawed he said
There is so much more
I should have done
So much I should have fixed
But my time passed
Time ran out
And now it's up to you

Better to die
Trying your best
Than surrendering
And being euthanized
By life's circumstance

And with that
He loosened his grasp
Rose to his feet
Bowed his head
And began to pray

Gently swaying
Back and forth
Beating his chest

Intensely uttering words
That were barely audible

Tears flooded across his face

I watched
As he experienced
The fullness
Of spiritual potential

Finding peace
That he never knew before

Never before
Had I seen him like that

Never before
Had I seen him pray

Never before
Had I felt
Such love
And admiration
For him

Never before
Had I understood
So much about him

Then he looked up
And said in a voice
That I could hear
And never forget
As he ended his prayer
Saying

Bless you Lord
For giving me
The power to pray

Bless you Lord
For hearing
And listening
To my prayer

My son
When you need answers
Remember these words
Take them to heart

“You shall be holy, for I,
The Lord, your God am holy.”

Life goes on he said
At such a
Frantic pace
It’s easy to
Forget those words
Lose our way

But remember
Always remember
Son
That life
Lived well
With all its flaws
Can nonetheless find salvation
Here on earth
In the course of life’s experiences
In the way
You navigate through them

Right where
Every single day
You take your stand
You summon up every ounce
Of moral strength
At your command

Remembering
That each act of holiness
Is itself a prayer

That each prayer
Enables
Healing
Faith and
Love

Remember
The last words I wrote

“Reach out and
By Act or Deed
Touch a Life!
Ever Remembering that
The life you touch
Is also your own!”

Late in the night
I tapped
His wrist
Time to sleep
Shlol Shlof Shlof

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