

Eulogy for Larry Brick

My Dad was an extraordinary man. He was a loving man. Expressive and unafraid to be sweet and caring. And to be himself. Not in the sense of a rebel interested in flouting conventions - he didn't have that kind of ego. Rather, I think, his own experience of being Deaf and being raised in a time when to be Deaf meant that everyone, including those who loved you most, wanted you to be some version of normal - i.e. hearing.

I think that his own experience of fighting to be himself, gave him a deep desire to always live in a way that allowed others to be themselves.

This is no small thing. You can imagine how dumbfounded I was, when as a teenager, I found out that my Dad could play the piano- sight reading the music perfectly though he couldn't hear the music he played. And that he spoke French - not just read French, but as a profoundly Deaf man, he could speak and lipread French. This is at a time when I myself— a hearing, self-absorbed teen— am failing out of my own French class in high school. Piano and French. Deaf kid trying hard to be “normal”. This is an insane testament to my Dads skills and abilities. And of the kind of twisty road he traveled to be able to define himself for himself.

As a kid, I was lucky enough to have that huge person in my corner- a father, full of unqualified love, who deeply, profoundly, wanted me to be my own self, to help me be whatever self I wanted to be - often by just by staying out of the way, not judging. He truly didn't judge and I was a pretty weird thing in the world! For example, as I grew up I realized how many boys struggled with— and were pretty beat up by— versions of masculinity that they inherited not only from the culture writ large, but specifically through their fathers. I am so lucky I didn't have that battle coming at me from my dad. I was girly as a kid, I liked being girly and I made no secret of it. One day in high school I decided to go to school as a girl - with clothes and make up I could actually pass. Remember now, it's 1985, public school in Missouri: I was given in-school suspension for causing a disruption, then they reversed it and sent me back to class, then asked me to go home and change- it was a scene. But you know what? I didn't think twice about doing it - I was being myself- a tricky and provocative self that I had no fear would cause me trouble at home. My dad never criticized me and maybe what's most significant is that I never even worried about what my Dad would think. I am so grateful to him for that.

I try hard to live up to his example with my own child and I know for a fact that I fall short. But that value is in me and I am so grateful for it. Because it's not just a value he had with family but also a way of being in the world - *How do you treat people? How do you do your work? How do you think about what you deserve vs what other people deserve?* Something fundamental about privilege and equity are at stake if you try to

answer those questions in a way that doesn't hinder others ability to be and become their full selves. My Dad had a genius for that — to not only have that fundamental value but to parlay it into pro-active structures. For example: instituting a weekly staff meeting at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf that was “no-voice”. So simple! But it empowered the Deaf staff so their voices were better heard, it empowered the hearing staff by giving them a forum to improve the foundational skill for teaching Deaf students, and maybe most of all, it empowered the students because it created a richer, accessible language environment for them as the sign language abilities of everyone improved. He instituted it without creating conflict or resistance between the Deaf and hearing staff. Simple and profound. The right gesture. My dad was a wise man.

My Dad went so quickly that some things didn't get said. Maybe it was a blessing that he did go so quickly- in the final couple of weeks, he was truly at a loss with his lack of physical ability that had come upon him so suddenly- he has always been so intensely physical and disciplined- he worked out every day and even in his hospice bed a couple of days before he died, he asked if we could do some exercises to help him get stronger. So I'm glad he didn't suffer longer than he did. But, it happened so fast there were some things I didn't get to tell him....

Things that come from being a dad myself now and knowing how scary it is to be a parent, because loving someone so much means you're intensely vulnerable— worrying about the well-being of your child and at some point having so little control over it. I know now. Daddy, I am so sorry for what I put you through. Especially, I want to say:

I am so sorry I dropped out of school without telling you and then on a cold, rainy March night- when you had no idea where I was and if I was okay, I called you to pick me up out on I-95 where I had been hitchhiking and had just been robbed of what little stuff I had in my backpack and you drove to where I was in the middle of the night and picked me up without saying one mean thing and brought me home and let me leave again without demanding an explanation.

Thank you for that Daddy. I am so, so sorry I put you through that. And: thank you again. For wanting me to be myself. For teaching me to make a world where everyone can become themselves better - their weird, multiplicitous, righteous, tricky, wrong-headed, graceful selves.

This morning as I woke up I saw two huge crows playing in a tree outside my window, it was the first thing I saw. They were so big and playful- shaking the branches of the tree and trading places over and over. Maybe there were ravens? Last week as I was driving with my mom I said something to my mom that instantly made us both feel deep regret. I wish I hadn't said it. And all of a sudden a strange rainbow appeared in the sky. It wasn't rainy or even particularly cloudy, but there was one big cloud in the sky and in

the middle of it was a rainbow. I have never seen anything like it. These signs are hugs from Daddy. He was a really good hugger. Really, the best hugger I have ever met. He hugs with an intensity that suddenly appears from nowhere, full and ardent: I love you, I appreciate you, I am so happy to see you. Or, a hug of: It was so good to see you, I already miss you! His love is unabashed, fully expressed without self-consciousness or inhibition. Just a lot of love pouring out of him. Thank you Daddy. I'll keep looking for hugs so don't stop.

David Brick