

That day in the snow was different for me. Despite all our best efforts to erase our biology in favor of evolved relationships, boys compete with their fathers. Suddenly, for me, it was so *easy*. Strength, sinew, lungs and muscles--*man*, the *MUSCLES*--without training, without effort— it all worked so well. For me, it was a *laughing* matter. A laughing, running, dodging, leaping hearty grand old time can't catch me matter.

I had bested the man that was my barometer of the human male: strength and stamina and fearlessness; the Mighty Schlepper of Bags; a leader, a navigator of airports and maps, one of the ones in charge...a father...a husband...a Man...

All I had done was OUTRUN him. The monumental scale of being accepted into the fraternity of Men dwarfs youth's arrogant, raw power. The Boy doesn't understand the difference between masculinity and machismo. The Boy confuses domination for strength. The Boy believes respect for others is the same as weak acquiescence.

When I was much younger, and afraid, my pop told me to have courage. I said that I couldn't help it if I was afraid, and he told me that courage does not come from being without fear. Courage is being afraid, but doing it anyway, with eyes up and heart forward.

To step forward into the role of Man takes courage, but my eyes have been held high and my heart has been strong knowing that, because I had seen it, it is possible to do. It is possible to be many things contradictory. You can indulge in the urge to protect and not make those around you feel weak. You can be strong and violent at need, but vulnerable, too. Displaying emotion is not the same as simpering. You CAN like football AND musical theatre.

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We are a nation of production and pace; anything that doesn't produce or keep the pace is discarded.

When did this apply to humans? Contribution doesn't HAVE to be at the assembly line. Tradition is not a widget to be bought and sold. You don't have to clock in to hold intellectual debate. Experience isn't traded on the stock market. When did we trade patina for gloss?

New stuff is great. Like a boy that can outrun his pop, it's got energy and vitality and limitless expectations. But we need focus, discipline and to LEARN a thing or two to become men and women of brilliance. Energy and talent are only a foundation.

My pop has a back that hurts. He can't walk to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah morning like we used to do. He doesn't stitch cuts or set bones anymore. He's now claiming his part of the civilization we all pay for all our working lives.

My mom is still working: molding minds with music and culture. I guess she's the one healing wounds now, in a way. But she won't dance like she used to. I know she worries about her skin and her bones and her hair.

They talk about how quickly things went. They confuse things that little baby Ambrose did with things that little baby Casey did because it's all a big, blurry, roiling mass of life steaming on by like a train.

But, boy, what a train-ride! To have been there for it all! How can I hope to be productive and keep up my pace if I don't hitch a ride on the caboose? The train might be fast, but it's a long one.

We can't learn everything from our parents, because the most solid lesson I have had as a parent is that I hardly know anything. But civilization and progress rely on the summation of collective experience. We learn that from a mom that won't play games anymore with a cheating son, even if it breaks both their hearts, because she knows that allowing him to lie will eventually break his heart much, much worse.

My pop has an axiom that he applies to medicine: "Everything causes everything." This is true of our lives, too, and it solves the nature versus nurture debate in one fell swoop: We are *something* when we are born, and that *something* keeps on burning until we die; but if that *something* is a burning fire, our parents stack the wood, and keep us alight, and bank coals for the cold morning.

It's easy to think that life dwindles down like a fire, fades into a trickle of vitality before softly blipping out like an old TV set. But it doesn't. I can see it in the eyes of my parents: all that *meat* is still there, and the coals burn white-hot, even if they are covered by ash. Wisdom is the new vitality, and they are busting out the sleeves of their shirts with it.

We speak with dread terror of the world we leave our children, and how we wish we could leave them a world like a precious glass heirloom; there are two kids, at LEAST, I can name that should never have to wear a gas mask or huddle in a bunker or... *panhandle* or eat shoe leather, or... or... or...

But the world we touch goes in all directions, and you aren't in it or not in it. You have bits and pieces in the world you forged, and the world that is being forged, and your bits will linger in worlds yet unimagined. We are all of us children, and the world is not an inheritance to be squandered or invested, but a changing thing—always changing—belonging to those that live, those that have lived, and those yet to live.