

Three years ago, I gave my father a photo album for his birthday. It was a simple black album with fifty transparent sleeves. I remember filling it one afternoon on the floor of my old room. It was magic hour. Everything was golden, and I was thinking about how to order these photos, which ones to place side by side, which ones to put at the beginning, which ones to put at the end.

Most of the photos in the album are of rooftops, squares, and staircases in Sevilla and Granada, two cities in the South of Spain. There are some close-ups of the ceiling of Alhambra, the details of it, the colors, the Moorish doorways.

I took these photos in 2009.

I was living in Barcelona, and my father and mother had come to see me, to make sure, I think, that I did come home.

I showed my parents Barcelona, and then, the three of us traveled south to Andalucia.

Alhambra, an 11<sup>th</sup> Century palace, in Granada, made a great impression on my father.

I like thinking of us there, my father, taking photos, with his first digital camera, looking at the ceiling with this magnificent sense of wonderment.

In all my life, I'd never seen a ceiling like that one.

Neither had he.

He called me one night, some time last year, to tell me that there was a documentary on Alhambra on the History Channel, his favorite channel. I was in my bedroom—this time, in Philadelphia—standing by the windows. I haven't had a TV since college, so, without thinking about it, I asked my father to describe the documentary—to tell me what he was seeing, more or less—and, for some reason, even though I guess it was a strange thing to ask him to do, he didn't question me. He just did it: Well, he said, there's a courtyard. It's called the Court of Lions. There are orange trees all around it, in double rows that lead to a fountain. Then, there's the main room, the one with the blue and gold walls.

Do you remember it?

It became a ritual of ours to flip through that photo album, something we would do together, any time I came to visit.

I don't think it was a matter of nostalgia or escapism. It was meditative. It brought us—what he might have called—peace.

This, though, was just one of many rituals—and it *was* ours specifically—so, I want to tell you about other rituals. I want to tell about memories. I want to remind you of him.

He played the air guitar at red lights. He played Tommy, the entire album, when we drove to the Cottage in the summer or to Canada in the winter.

Ask Vivian or Scott any line; they know it.

There was this Billy Joel song, too, called “In the Middle of the Night.” The unique aspect of that song was a long pause, so he made a game out of it. Any time we played it, at the pause all of us would shout: “It’s over. It’s over,” and then, the song would continue.

He cooked us breakfast—“big breakfasts” we called them—on Saturdays and Sundays. He used to drive his old Saab, full speed, and weave it from side to side on Dante Street if our mother wasn't in the car.

He bribed us—mostly, Vivian—to go sailing with him. Tuna melts or BLTs from Local Hero. Vivian would spend the entire sail, wrapped in a fleece blanket, in the V berth, eating gold fish.

He coached our soccer games, He watched our soccer games. He was friends with other parents and other coaches.

He showed us how to raise the main and furl the sail, and, even though—he wanted us to be sailors, like him—it was never something he forced upon us. He left Vivian to the V berth. That was okay, too.

For, my father was gentle, kind, and, for lack of a better word, “cool.”

In his honor—and, mostly, because I think he'd like this—I'd like you to just sort of roll along and step into the past with me.

Let's begin in Houston, Texas, twenty-eight years ago, because for a long time, I believed, like so many children, that my father's life began with me.

My mother and father have just moved to Houston from Scottsdale, Arizona, which, for any of you who are wondering, is not Larchmont, New York. It's desert, so, it's only temporary.

You can't sail in the desert.

Houston, in its way, feels closer to home for both of my parents. Aunt Sarah and Uncle John are living there with Chrissy, Katie, and Jay, and so is, my Uncle Rocky's sister, whose name my dad always pronounced, like this: Sallllly.

My father's record player is playing Little Feet and the Stones all Saturday long. There are costume parties, my father as Popeye, my mother as Olive Oil. There's some story about a hot tub, and there is a boat: a hobie, sailed out in Galveston.

There is also me. After my christening, Cousin Jay says: It's all about Ingrid, and in a way, I guess it is. Before I turned three months old, my dad had me out on the water, in a lace white bonnet, as if to say, here you are: Here's the world, I want to show you.

Five years later, in 1990, there are five us, not three. Scott is three and Sweet Vivian is a newborn. We've moved to Crestwood, New York—to this beautiful green and yellow Victorian house, one that bore some resemblance to our house on Kilmer Road. We're already members of the Larchmont Yacht Club, a sign of what's come. We have a boat named Mistral that, our good friends the MacArtneys, later, bought from us and renamed, Mister Al.

At our house in Crestwood, there are parties and barbecues out back. The Levinsons are in Scarsdale. The MaGlaughlins are across the street. Lisa Niccolini and my mom are taking calligraphy courses together. Aunt Norma and Uncle John live only a few blocks away. We have good company, and we have our first CD player now—a gift from Uncle Fritz, I'm told—and there's a CD called Graceland that always seems to be on.

In another four years, on Valentine's Day—my father's birthday, his fortieth this time—my mother is hosting a surprise party, in the middle of a blizzard. We're living in Larchmont now. There's a white picket fence and a dogwood tree in our front yard. My father has no idea about the party because he never has any idea about surprises. My mother tells him to go over to the MacArtnays house, so, that she can prepare. The lie is that: Keith is locked in the bathroom. What I wonder, still, is: was Keith actually locked in the bathroom?

Anne brings appetizers over on a sled; loaves of bread fall all over the snow.

Some of my dad's family is there, so, what else is there to say—it began to roll. Generations began to intermingle. "Loving Cup" is playing. Vivian and Scott are dancing. My dad spins me around, then my sister, as if he's trying to teach the whole party a lesson: this is how it's done. This is life.

We renovated that house—10 Dante Street—and, actually, lived in it throughout the renovation. The addition we called it. My mother and father put their bed in our living room. The bunk beds were in the TV room, and my mother told me, that, at night, after all the workers left, my dad liked to go upstairs and talk over the plans. His father, Otto, was an architect, so, this makes sense.

All this time, my dad is a sales executive.

He's worked at Nine-ex then, at Verizon. He's with Castle Systems and AT&T. At work, just like at home, he has "good buddies"—that's exactly what he would have called them. There are layoffs but there are also laughs—and this rare and incredible support for one another. I just found out that he had two nicknames—Otto—even at work—and the Silver Fox. His buddies say that he always had a smile on his face.

And, from what I know of my father, that's not hard to believe.

Just one more stop in time:

The first, December, 2002 or 2003, a Christmas party. We're living across town now. 1 Kilmer Road. It's my senior year of high school. Scott's a freshman. Vivian's in sixth grade. The Irvings are over. The Estabrooks. The Smiths. The Kvernlands. The Waldens are in the U.K. already. We had seen them over Thanksgiving—gone to the Tower of London, the Wax Museum, the Eye. There are so many good friends under our roof—there's a fire—and my dad is

in the kitchen with me, welcoming someone inside. I am taking a coat. He's gracious. He has a look in his eye that he sometimes gets out on the water, just past the break wall, like he can't believe this, how good his life is; how happy his friends are. He is here.

He had so much to be grateful for—the best of friends—the best of family—the best of buddies, and if I have to tell you anything about my dad today, it's that none of that was lost on him.

He felt so lucky to have and know all of you. He loved you as much as I know you loved him.