

## CONFESSION

Today is July 1, 2010, and as I woke up this morning, I was stricken with guilt. I had totally forgotten that yesterday was my father's Yahrzeit. From the time I was Bar Mitzvah'd, I felt impelled to say Kaddish for my father on or around June 30. If we hadn't gone to shul around that date, I would say it at home. I am not sure when my mother told me the date of my father's death. As a small child I knew that my father died when I was 3 ½. Whenever anyone asked me if I have any memory of him, I said no. I have a few pictures of my father, including one of me, as a baby, sitting on his lap, but that is it.

Over the years, June 30 has taken on a certain sadness for me. I think about what life would have been like if my father had lived. What kind of a father would he have been? I look at my friends' fathers and I am not very impressed. I don't think he would have played ball with me, or would even have been interested in my progress in school. Would our lives have been better? Apparently, he was hit hard by the depression and was unable to make a living, which may have explained his cashing in his life insurance, without my mother's knowledge. Yet, he might have had better luck than my mother earning some money to put food on the table and paying the rent. Going through my mother's papers after she died, I got the impression that theirs was a strained relationship. He didn't accompany her to the Yiddish theatre or to Paris in 1926. He did not seem to share her interests. My mother's unhappiness with card playing and smoking must be related to the fact that my father played cards and smoked.

Growing up, I viewed being a fatherless child more of an embarrassment than a tragedy. On a few occasions in elementary school, when a kid would ask me what my father did, I would answer that he was a salesman. I would never tell anyone that my father was dead.

After I started going to Hebrew School, my mother insisted I go to shul on the Jewish holidays. When I was in shul (alone) on those holidays when Yizkor was said, and all the kids left, and I thought I was the only kid remaining among all those grown-ups, I felt awful, and even more embarrassed. As we read the Yizkor prayer, "Yizkor Elohim nishmas avi..." and I was supposed to insert my father's name, I always wondered if God might be confused if I said his name wrong. Should I say Louis Schlitt or Lazar Schlitt or Eleazar Schlitt? Then I read the English translation of the Yizkor prayer, and realized that it said I was supposed to give charity, and I hadn't given charity, and had no intention of giving charity. Would it invalidate my saying Yizkor? Would God not remember his soul? Reading the English translation further, it referred to perpetuating ideals that were important to him. I had no idea what ideals were important to him. Over time, I learned what ideals were important to my mother, but I had the feeling that they didn't share the same ideals.

As a teen-ager, the strongest memory I have of my shul when Yizkor was said, was the weeping and wailing of the women up n the balcony. Though I felt a sadness, I was unable to generate even a tear for the occasion, let alone an audible cry. With the death of my cousin Gabie in 1945, I added his name when I said Yizkor, and then I cried. In

fact, over the years, whenever I think of Gabie, I get choked up. But strangely, not for my father. And yesterday, it happened. I forgot that it was my father's Yahrzeit. So when I finish this, I will get my yarmulke, and a sidder, and say Kaddish. Better late than never.