

MY KIDS IN 2013

Since this is “my story” I have been writing about myself, but of course, a part of me is my family. From time to time, I have wondered what kind of a father have I been. I don’t believe I have every asked my children, nor do I believe it would be easy for my kids to give me a totally honest answer. There are countless stories about the relationships between parents and children, and they run the gamut from warm and loving, to cold and hateful. It is easy to say that I love my children and have tried to do everything for them. But how do they see me? Interfering? Neglectful? Supportive? Critical? Generous? Stingy? Selfish? Concerned? Idealistic? Living in the past? Preachy? Judgmental? I just came up with a long list—about me, when this was supposed to be about my children. It is much like the story about two friends who meet, and the talkative one tells the other all that he is doing, and then says, “Enough about me. Let’s talk about you: What do you think of my new suit?”

OK. From here on in, it’s about how I see them.

Carol: I can’t believe my oldest is approaching 58. In many ways she is most like me. And like me, bigger on form than substance. But unlike me, Carol has been bopping around career-wise, and has put together a weird resume. Worked for wonderful “non-profits” from unions to organizations concerned with peace, the economy, consumers, women’s rights etc. But never stayed long enough to establish herself. A part-time consultant is not a career.

When we lived in Crown Heights, Carol went to PS 138 where she was frequently the only white child in her class. After we moved to DC and to another “integrated” neighborhood, and went to the Shepard school, she observed, “now I know what an integrated school is.” Carol enjoyed school and was something of a leader. However Paul Junior High was almost like PS138, but Carol put the best face on that experience: she learned how to dance like the black kids. On to integrated Wilson where she learned French, and where a black recruiter from Oberlin got her interested in the school. He was trying to recruit black kids.

Carol majored in French and philosophy, had her first love affair, spent her junior year in France, broke her wrist jumping off a train, returned to Oberlin and graduated, found non-profit jobs in DC and then NY, went on to NYU Law School, had boyfriends, finally married Alan 10 years ago, moved to West Orange NJ from Bleeker St., adopted Elliott, became a suburban housewife and mother, picked up a few consultant jobs, became a triathlete, and joined a Synagogue. Of my three older children, Carol is the only one who identifies Jewishly. She and Alan are sending Elliott to a Hebrew School and a Jewish Day Camp. In her New York days, Carol became involved in the hip Temple B’nai Jeshurun.

There were two qualities that all of us in the family were aware of: her obsession with vacations and her quickness to criticize. At times, it seemed that Carol spent more time thinking about vacations and vacationing, than about the job she was holding down. And

I suspect it became obvious to her superiors. Being picky and critical must also have been obvious to her superiors as it was to her family. There were many occasions when I was hurt by a thoughtless remark she made. Interesting, that soon after she married, the nasty remarks became much fewer, but I am sorry to say that they are back. Though Carol is attempting to be more modest with regard to vacations, she still indulges herself in two weeks on Martha's Vineyard, and is speaking of a French vacation for their 10th Anniversary. And she tries to get away for long weekends whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Divorce has an impact on children (and on the parents) and I have a vivid memory of the response of all three of my children when I told them that Sylvia and I were divorcing. Carol actually said "good, no more arguments." That hurt me. One can talk about "joint custody" but where the children live with the mother, and only spend occasional weekends and a few weeks in the summer with the father, the mother really has custody.

Finally, Carol tends to be the child who "remembers." She sends the Father's Day and birthday cards. She e-mails and calls. It is important. And she has seen to it that Elliott does the right thing. It is sweet when he is on the phone and asks for Franny. Again "form" but better observing form than ignoring it.

Lewis: This will certainly be colored by the excitement of his marriage to Nina on June 1. For several months before, we were in closer contact than we had been for some time. I have always felt that Lewis demonstrated an artistic bent from early on. He drew, and his early prints were impressive. He continued doing art in high school, and chose the violin as an instrument to study when he was in elementary school, then switched to the saxophone. He hung around with the creative kids in high school, was a reader, and was good at most everything he undertook. I remember teaching him and playing tennis with him, and after he attended a DC tennis camp, he was better than me.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, Lewis seemed more upset than either Carol or Martha when Sylvia and I separated. We did a lot together when he was in high school—as I did with the other kids. Biking, museums, and on one occasion, I was returning from a meeting in California, and sent him an airline ticket to New Orleans where we met and spent several days together sightseeing and listening to jazz.

Like Carol, Lewis had one year at PS 138, not a pleasant experience, liked Shepard and made lots of neighborhood friends, went to the local conservative Synagogue's Hebrew School and had a lovely Bar Mitzvah, went to the more integrated Deal Junior High, but was still shaken down by some tough black kids, which resulted in his no longer carrying money.

I tried to pass on to Lewis my values, as I did with the other kids. I never knew what he really felt. Civil rights: he had his experiences from Crown Heights to DC, and the schools he attended. Labor and economic justice: I assumed that he agreed that unions were important and that we should support efforts to end poverty. He was aware that Sylvia and I were opposed to nuclear testing and to the dangers of nuclear energy. We

had been active in the Committee for a Sane Nuclear policy when we lived in New York. When at Wesleyan, there was a group that went to demonstrate against a nuclear facility in New Hampshire, he joined them. But I suspect not with the intensity of some of the others. And when he left Wesleyan and came to Cambridge, I helped him get a job with DSA, but I never felt that he was committed to Democratic Socialism.