

I was lucky to grow up with a father like mine. As a kid, he made our lives simple by painting things in black and white. Everyone's role was "clear." If I wanted love and warmth, I always knew where to find it — it wasn't with my dad. But if I wanted a safe place, if I wanted to know right from wrong, if I needed moral advice, or if I was missing some details to complete the bigger picture in front of me — I could always find an open door, clarity and a willingness to share.

Although he showed us how to be tough, there was always humor in the room. And boy, did he like it dry.

My father was born in Ireland. Not only was he a Jew in an unfriendly place, but he was also small in size. So it makes complete sense that he relied on his greatest strength — his mind. My father was an unofficial historian. He knew more about world history than most of us ever will. He was also an unofficial Jewish scholar — he knew the Talmud, the Gemara, the Mishna, and I'm sure a few other books I've never even heard of.

He was, however, an official genealogist — a field that perfectly connects history and Judaism. In a time when there is endless debate and gaslighting about our connection to this land, for us it was simple: my father proved that we were descendants of King David, generation after generation.

I guess growing up in the Diaspora made him appreciate things we take for granted — like traveling freely in our own land, speaking our own language without fear. After all that, it made perfect sense for him to make Aliyah and help build our country — whether by farming fish, (kind of) serving in the Air Force, developing the kibbutz and the factory, all while never neglecting his family across the world.

He loved meeting relatives, hearing their stories, and fitting them into the great mosaic called *the Yodaikens*. He showed them they were part of something bigger. He showed them they belonged.

It was only after I turned 18 that I began to see my father's vulnerable and gentle side. I saw him struggle with the changes happening around him, losing interest in the present and getting lost in the past. But he always stood tall, greeted us with a smile, showed interest in our lives — and if there was room for a joke, he appreciated it, whether he was the one telling it or hearing it.

In the end, he taught us what truly matters in this world. The words he said to us most often were the simplest and most powerful of all: *"I love you."*

I know the last three years were hard for you, and if I had any part in that, I'm sorry. Please know that I heard you loud and clear every time you told me you loved me — and I will forever cherish those words. I pray to God that you also heard me when I told you the same — as you closed your eyes for the last time.

You led a good and remarkable life. You did good for so many people — anyone who knew you would agree. You built a home in Israel, a united family that loves you and will always remember you.

Now you can rest. And I'd like to believe that you are reunited with all the family and friends you loved and lost over the years.

I love you, Abba.

Hillel

