

“NONE OF US:” FOUR POEMS ABOUT DAD

(FOR JAMES ANTHONY DASPIT, JR., MAY 7, 1929 – MARCH 21, 2020)

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7-23-17

sunday morning
and dad just called to
tell me about a dream
he had

something he has never done before.

seems we were driving
in his first truck
a '55 black Dodge
with a stick shift on the steering column

a truck he sold decades ago.

of course dad was driving
because I didn't know how
to drive a stick
when he owned
that truck

still don't

still don't speak the languages of
machinists and electricians and
carpenters
that he was fluent in

just like his father
and
his brothers
and
my brothers.

I speak from a different lexicon
one where gravity curls
and stars splinter
and madness manifests
in places mostpeople
never see.

in the dream
 my dad says he suddenly
 couldn't drive the truck

much like he no longer calls us by
 our given names
 but by the brothers he's buried.

he stopped the truck
 turned to me
 said
 "your turn."

12.10.17

my dad fumbled for words more than usual
 today at lunch, confusing not only the waitress
 but us.

"where am i?" he asked more than once
 claiming to know where "the forest" was
 and where "beyond" was and knowing that this place
 was never those things.

it took a while for my
 mom to explain to the waitress, and to us,
 that those were clubs on the main highway
 between where she grew up and where he
 did.

we drove that main highway on the way back home
 as we have countless times
 as it has tethered my dad to my mom's family
 for over sixty years
 and has a long cord wrapped around my heart too.

he noted where "the forest" and "beyond" should
 have been, understood that the buildings were
 no longer there, that some things have changed,
 "but not that much," he insisted, "the road looks pretty
 much the same."

i was driving my mom's car, and everyone in the car
 knew there weren't going to be too many more of these
 lunches, what with the way time is, the way things change,
 even if not that much.

6-19-2020

dad died
 two days
 before the lockdown.
 we knew it was coming
 ever since he woke up
 in the middle of the night
 and stood over his flashlight collection
 and fell
 from the latest stroke.

we knew it
 even
 before this life

of feeding tubes
 heart monitors
 catheters
 dialysis
 breathing treatments
 speech therapy
 blood work
 diapers.

the week after the funeral
 mom asked to
 watch the

Hank Williams movie
 she saw with me
 and my sister
 years ago
 in a theater
 only us
 in attendance.

I Saw the Light.

When it ended
 she said
 “Dad never liked Hank Williams much.”

11.7.2020

you could ride the elevator up to see your
 dad on the 4th floor of the hospital
 and down to get back to work
 or home
 or the grocery store

every day for the six weeks after the stroke
 for six weeks after mom heard him collapse on their bedroom floor
 in the middle of the night
 couldn't move him
 so she tucked a pillow under his head
 put a blanket over him
 and waited until morning to call us.

you could ride the elevator every day and rarely see the same
 faces

but you know the looks . . .
 the questions (will she make it out of here?)
 the fears (will he ever walk again?)
 the panic (why don't they recognize me?)

you nod
 they nod
 sometimes someone says something about the weather
 or comments on the pretty flowers in someone's hands.

almost always
 we bless each former stranger as they exit on
 their floor
 we whisper, "good luck."

you could drive every morning before work
 and every afternoon after work
 to that hell house of a "skilled nursing facility"
 walk through the halls of dementia
 and amputees and desperation
 to room 427
 to listen to dad's same pleas
 "when we go home don't forget the TV!"
 "they sure got a lot of regulations in this place"
 "well isn't this a fine predicament -- I'm a baby again, in diapers"

but after the first couple of days you begin to read
 the nametags on the nurses and the caretakers
 you begin to do more than nod at folks who
 never
 ever
 have anyone visit them.

within a couple of weeks your sister
 who is there day after day with mom
 begins to take you outside for smoke breaks
 introduces you to the cats she gives treats to
 brings you to Ruth's room and introduces you
 to Ruth and her roommate Clara.

Ruth hides her cigarettes
with my sister's consent
in my dad's room lest her family find out.

you're walking back from a friday meeting on campus to your office
valentine's day
without any thought of the day other than it's a friday
and what's the seafood special they'll bring my mom
to hear your sister's voice
"don't panic . . . we're taking dad to the emergency room . . .
he's non-responsive but he's ok"

I beat them to the emergency room.

you ride the elevator on sunday to see your dad in the
6th floor post-intensive care unit
and you realize that you're seeing
many of the same faces from 2 months ago

and when you ride the elevator down to go to the cafeteria
you recognize Chaplain Inez
and Stephanie and Maggie and Traci, 4th floor nurses
and when you get in line in the cafeteria
the woman scooping the meat into the taco salad says
"back honey?"

my dad asks

when I make it back up for my shift
and relieve my sister and mom so they can go home
for a quick bath, a change of clothes

"if I lost all of this"

and he waves his IV and monitor laden arms at the
various tubes he's connected to

"would I just disappear?"

since even on his deathbed (a month away if you're curious)
my dad could smell the bullshit
miles away.

I look at him
then back at the television
that's always on

"no dad, you won't disappear
none of us in this hospital will.
none of us."