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## First, Dad Lost Mom. Then He Lost His Tether to Reason.

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When my mother, Trudy, died, my father, Alan, went underground.

He resurfaced a month later with Sally, a wealthy Boca Raton widow.

Dad married Sally at the Boca Raton Hotel and divorced her before I finished writing thank you notes for my mother's Shiva brisket. One by one, my parents' old friends dropped him.

"Your mother was really the one we loved," said my mother's friend Annette, whose raspy voice belied her Linda Evans face, on more than one occasion.

It seemed like hundreds of widows of two types followed Sally: Those who had facelifts and those who needed them. The opportunity to hunt and gather a new crop of nipped platinum blondes and tucked redheads became a life force all its own -- one that made him uncharacteristically quixotic. The father I knew was a reserved, intelligent southern gentleman. His charm, however, would only secure a dinner date, not a woman to take my mother's place in the kitchen or elsewhere.

"All these women know is to give you a peck on the cheek after you take them to dinner," he complained.

"Tell me, Daddy, what do you expect after a rack of lamb and a dab of chocolate mousse?"

"A little affection. Some of them are like cold fish."

Womanizer, ladies' man -- misogynist -- was a side of this old-school CPA that nobody saw coming. Approaching 75, he had my neck whipping around like a frenzied KitchenAid.

Unfortunately, he did more hunting than gathering. I saw myself moving from Daddy's girl to dating coach to caretaker.

After Dad's Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diagnoses (unaware, he went back to the same doctor for a second opinion), he finally considered an assisted-living facility near our home in Virginia Beach.

"Joe," he politely addressed the administrator. "Why don't you have more Jewish residents?" Joe indulged my father for an hour of such questions.

"We had four. One just died."

"Dad, you just picked through 400 Jews in Florida," I pointed out.

His pre-move high was talking. "Sweetie, this time will be different." But his 12 moves in 12 years had bruised my optimism.

At the facility, he made it his mission to lobby against pork on behalf of all Jews in assisted living. That was unchanged, regardless of Parkinson's-Alzheimer's dementia.

Dad quickly went from a tall, impeccably dressed man to the guy who arrived at his dentist's office

detailed with yesterday's meatloaf. He was declining before my eyes; the lines were blurring between his personality quirks and disease.

He was rushed to the hospital, where I could see a disheveled Dr. W was stretched thin -- but I needed a lifeline for my father. So I did what any good daughter would do. I strung the line with delicate butter cookies shipped from Greenberg's Bakery, Deb Segaloff's organic-apricot-filled hamantaschen and my homemade tuna fish salad sandwiches.

"May I ask," said the kind Yiddish-speaking doctor, whose beard was dotted with crumbs, "who is going to follow your father's care when I discharge him?"

This question told me I was only one Connie Korman challah (a loaf the size of an infant car seat) from reeling him in. "If Dr. W doesn't take offense by the bread's resemblance to baby Jesus in the manger," I said to my husband, "I think we've got a doctor."

Dad was back at his apartment, where his diseased brain was clinging to our phone number the way a child clutches a binky.

"Hi, sweetie, this is Dad. How are we related?"

"I'm your daughter, Lisa. The baby . . . the accident."

"Did you graduate high school?"

"Yes," I said. "And college. I went to Chapel Hill."

"Oh, that's where I went! I don't remember seeing you there!"

On weekends we had our Tuesdays with Morrie sessions. He tried not to slump out of his favorite Ethan Allen chair while sharing emotional details of his life. His itch for objectifying women was now a pockmark on a long road. He said just what I hoped to hear when I asked him what he loved about my mother.

On weekday mornings, when clarity prevailed, he'd call just to chat. Or, just to say he couldn't find his Depends when I just spread them around his apartment like birdseed. One morning, without thinking I said, "Dad, can't this wait? I'm busy writing about what a wonderful daughter I am."

It was our last laugh.

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