

Dr Irving Siegel, my father, was a person who gave without requesting or requiring a thank you

Yet, these were the last two words I said to him when I was last by his side.

Thank you.

Thank you for being my mentor and leading me in the direction of dentistry.

Thank you for what you taught me through the example of treating your own patients, of which there were many.

Dr. Irving Siegel took care of those few wished to support. In his office he treated the young and elderly, mentally compromised , immigrants new to this country who spoke little English, Drug addicts and alcoholics and patients with economic hardships. Out sided his office he volunteered his time with the physically handicapped patients suffering from Cerebral Palsy.

Even on a good day these were difficult patients to handle but he treated each with a kindness and respect most rarely experienced.

For forty years (in Far Rockway and Oceanside New York) he did all he could for his patients, practicing at a pace many could not match. Often singing old songs with the wrong words and loving every minute of the frenetic energy flying through the air.

His love for dentistry continued in his love of learning, discussion, and supporting his profession. In my years of graduation from dental school he achieved his Fellowship from the Academy of General Dentistry,( which requires over 500 hours of continuing education and passing a written exam). He was also a member of every dental organization available to him. Even after his stroke he would call me up and say “Cheryl, did you read the article about amalgam in Dentaltown- what do you think?”

As I look backwards and forwards I know my father has passed on the joy of our profession, the satisfaction of being able to treat people kindly and respectfully and the knowledge that I will never be done learning.

For all this I say thank you...

Eulogy for Irving H. Siegel (2/5/25-1/18/08) by his daughter Cheryl Siegel, January 20, 2008, Boynton Beach, Florida

## Motion

My father had a camera he carried with him all the time while we were growing up. It was a small 35 mm camera that folded up into your pocket called a Kodak Retina IIA. He always took pictures wherever he was, whatever we were doing. It is through pictures that I will tell of his life.

The first picture I have of him hangs in our stairway with other family pictures. It is one that he did not take. On the back it is labeled Sonny – 4 years old; it is in black and white. He is wearing knickers, the old style pants and he is leaning against a granite stoop. My father is looking out at the world in wonderment, his life is ahead of him, he is still, getting ready. His eyes are wide.

Another picture I have is of him out in Coney Island. You know it is Coney Island because in the distance, just visible in the faded image is a picture of the Coney Island Parachute Drop. He is fit and buff, with a full head of thick hair. It is perhaps hard for his grandchildren to see him this way as much of their lives he was fighting the effect of his stroke. You have to imagine him in a tight bathing suite. His arms akimbo, feet in the sand. He was sixteen. He would go down to Crotona Park with his friend Stanley Schnapp to play handball. All you have in handball is your wits and your speed and a black ball and cement wall. Picture them racing back and forth striking that hard black ball with the palm of their hand, going for that killer shot, laughing and sweating on a hot summer day, a hot summer day that we have all lived through in New York City, outside. Nearby the handball courts, Elaine would be playing tennis with Stanley and her friends on the courts nearby the handball players. Our Mom and Dad were not destined to meet then.

The next picture I have is my father in dental school. It is around 1946. He leans in his white laboratory coat, focused on the work he is doing on a preparation. There is a dental drill, the old folding type in the background. He is working with his hands, the joy in his concentration, revealed in the set of his torso. He still has his head of hair.

Now he is coming down the wedding aisle, surrounded by his friend and family. He is wearing the funny little white rounded hat and our mom, Elaine, is moving with him holding hand. Everyone is smiling, wishing them nachas in their life to come. There is a small girl in the background, leaning up against her parents. Is it our cousin Wendy? Everything but Irving and Elaine is washed out, whether a photographer's trick or the truth will never be clear. Clear is that they are moving fast, striking out into a wedded life that last over fifty years.

You must forgive me for introducing a short movie at this juncture. It is a 8mm color movie that we all used to watch in the living room, played against a bare wall. My father is throwing Cheryl and me up and down, up and down, running around the backyard of their new house in Oceanside. The flickering on the wall is as clear as can be, round and round our father went, exuberant, successful. They have a tremendous home, his dental practice is expanding in Far Rockaway, perhaps the old red Hudson with the rusted running boards has been replaced by a new car. Our dad was throwing us up and down, up and down, always moving about the yard.

Our house at 350 Golf Drive was full of books. It had a room we called the mudroom. It was once a garage until one day, my parents working together to park the car, pulled forward a bit more, a bit more, until the front wall was knocked out. This mudroom was a collection of books, a library. My father loved philosophy, the big ideas, He read Will Durant, Bertrand Russell, Alfred Whitehead. Big books, big ideas. He would tell me that he would wake up in the middle of the night, perhaps it was because of my crying or needing a diaper change, and sit on the long black couch in the living room and read to me from Encyclopedia Britannica, starting at the A's. Our house was full of books and learning, overflowing from the mudroom into everyone's life. It is from this early time that I began to love books, to try and understand the world, and in particular science, as a vast multidisciplinary field of study; all the bits of humankind could be found in books. It would be my task to integrate and combine this to some sort of understanding. That experience was needed to temper the books would be a later lesson life itself gave me.

Our parents gave Cheryl and me a Jewish foundation. While we went to shul, much was centered on the family. The Passover Sedars always found a full house, with uncles, aunts, our Grandmother Julia around the fine wood table that could grow each year to accommodate, covered with china and glittering glasses. It was expected at these Jewish moments, that the three brothers, my father the youngest, the eldest Sol and the middle brother Jake, to stand nose to nose, arguing. Their sister Ruth would be there, watching over them, perhaps wringing her hands in happiness or despair. They continued this each year, the four of them at the graveside of their father Alukim-Getzl of blessed memory. I never knew exactly what they were arguing but it gave them a tremendous closeness.

We traveled to Israel for my bar-Mitzvah and I can remember being at the Wall, carrying the Torah, looking into the eyes of another boy, also 13, with teeth as buck as mine, but his hair was black and hung in curls about his ears covered by a rimmed hat. My hair was red and I wore a small white yarmulke. We did look right onto each other, knowing each other completely, for a moment.

At our more conventional Bar and Bat-Mitzvahs in the Oceanside Jewish Center in Oceanside, Cheryl and I read our portions, danced with friends and family and watched the brothers argue. Our parents brought us up as Jews and Jews we remain, each in our own special way.

Our father taught us and was always pushing us to succeed. I can remember one of our many trips to vacation in Miami Beach. My father and I went down to the beach early one morning and we found a clear piece of sandy beach. On it my father taught me algebra. He wrote the letters and symbols down in the sand. I must have been ten years old at the time. While I cannot remember any of the algebra, I certainly remember being taught, his fingers drawing the letters in the sand. He would help us with our homework, bringing his unique board perspective to bear on the work. He would awake me in the early morning to review my lesson for the day's examination. I would be half-awake and in the mode could answer each question correctly. While I might not have received a perfect grade in the class, I did each of those mornings.

Another picture in the transformed mudroom; it was now a beautiful brick fireplace room with pink marble floors from Italy. Dad is on the couch surrounded by his dogs, his hand on Rebee's head, stroking. Those years as we grew up were always busy. He was a dentist with two offices. In Far Rockaway, he had five dental chairs, everyone running to keep up with him. In Oceanside, there was a single chair office. Cheryl has said much of his dentistry. He healed those who had everything, the indigent, the infirm, and those who hath not the capacity to ask. All I can add is that he was always trying to heal the world. The word "Tikkun Olam" was never mentioned in the house, was not part of our vocabulary. Years later when introduced to the phrase at our children's Jewish Day School, I completely understood how his life, his Judaism, was expressed in his actions.

Our father loved our Mom deeply. He loved his books, his dogs, Cheryl and I and travel. As children and young teens, we traveled the world. He traveled with our Mom to Hawaii and to Mallorca. As a family, we sailed in Aruba with its perfect white beaches, skied the while slopes of Grey Rocks and Tremblant, saw England, Israel and Machu Picchu. There were trips to east and west coast Disney's. They would travel to visit us in college, in Montreal, Pittsburgh and Chicago. Our mom and dad had a tremendous trip to the Galapagos following in my father's hero Darwin's footsteps, a chance to see the islands where the theory of evolution was substantiated. There is a wonderful picture of him, behind him are huge rocks, the dark blue ocean with white caps, the azure sky over head. Looking closely the iguanas, those famous swimming iguanas blanketing the rocks can be seen.

He would travel North and South each week in the winter; performing dental work in the Oceanside office during the week and spending a long weekend in the warmth with Mom. Friday he pulled teeth. Saturday they would be together. One Saturday morning, his dentistry was stolen away by a stroke after forty-eight years. I am a neuroscientist; my helplessness roared strongly. There was nothing that neuroscience had to offer.

Ten years after the stroke, Mom and Dad fought for his life, to keep him moving, to keep them going. They loved each other profoundly over these last ten years. Mom was the caregiver, battling for his life against the gradual onset of cardiac disease, against physicians who in Florida, more often than not, did not pay close attention to the complete individual, just their own little piece, ignoring the grand interactions and designs of biology that our dad exalted in his studies and his life.

Mom and Dad lived full lives over that time, continuing world traveling to Alaska and Russia. They spent the last year, Mom called it the fiftieth year celebration, traveling to Europe visiting six countries while on a ship traveling up the Danube. I came to Florida last month to celebrate their upcoming fiftieth wedding anniversary. Dad fell very ill but recovered and spent his fiftieth in hospital. He started to recover but entropy, the increase in disorder of all systems with time, was not to be resisted.

Cheryl and I came back down to Florida a week ago. I brought books with me. I brought Schrödinger's "What is life?" It was one of his favorites. It was published in 1944. Irving was nearing his final year as an undergraduate. Those was the time pre-DNA, before Watson and Crick. My father had told me that he and his friends would stay up late, wondering what was the secret of life, how science might explain evolution in terms of mechanism. Schrödinger's book was a beam of light to many. He had told me to read when I was a teen. I had, but it was not until I had re-read as a scientist that I understood the attraction of Schrödinger's ideas to the young thinker, Irving Siegel.

I open the book in hospital, told him the title and read to my dad "What is life?"

"Love", he answered. He had love for all. He was generous. From this wellspring came his wit and happiness. He made us laugh for his love.

I continued from the Schrödinger. "When is a piece of matter said to be alive?"

From inside, welling up fully, profoundly. "Move".

I was confused, but read on. Schrödinger wrote "When it goes on 'doing something', moving..."

My father remembered much better than I.

Our father was always moving, doing something, loving, healing, fighting to live, fighting entropy.

That is how he is remembered, the wond'ring boy, the handball player, the newlywed, the dentist, traveler, husband and father – filling his life and all of ours with movement – the fullest life imaginable – always moving.

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