

Lesson My Father Shared with Me
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It is five years now since my father passed away. He lived to be 91 years old in spite of the difficult life he had. He was a holocaust survivor and a witness to many atrocities. He was born in 1923 in Poland in a small village called Tichen. We would always lovingly say that you can take the man out of Tichen but you could not take Tichen out of the man.

Growing up, my father only spoke to me in Yiddish. Yiddish is a combination of Hebrew and medieval German. Although there were different dialects, it was, and still is, a uniting language for Jews all over the world. Prior to the Holocaust, Yiddish was the language spoken between Jewish people all across Europe and Slavic countries. It is written with the Hebrew alphabet but sounds like German. Yiddish is rich with many expressions that are not easily translated to English. For almost every situation, my father had a Yiddish expression that would either make you laugh or put life into perspective.

My father was a simple person who believed, foremost, in being honest and decent. His family was very poor and there was never enough food, especially in the winter. When I would ask my father how he survived the war with so little food, he would say it was no different from the long winters before the war. Many winters they would only have potatoes to eat. As long as my father was alive, he never asked for a second helping at meals. He always said we needed to save for a rainy day.

My father was a religious man. Throughout the war he kept his faith and never stopped believing. Having lost his entire immediate family in the war, it was no surprise that he wanted a family of his own. My parents met in South America, having both, separately, immigrated there, to reunite with surviving relatives after the war. They came to America in 1951 with hardly any money but the will to work hard. They had three children and my father always said, and believed, that “every baby comes with their own bundle”.

One of the expressions he used a lot was “the people make plans and God laughs”. So many countless times I have said this expression to myself when plans were broken by illness, work or weather. But in the end, he added, everything always works out for the best.

As I sit home now, with my family, worrying about all the uncertainties in the world, I don't have to wonder what words of wisdom my father would give me. He would tell me not to worry because there would be food for my children, he would say don't make any plans except to love and protect your family and, last, he would tell me to trust the experts and believe that there will be better days ahead. That's what he told himself as a young man in the holocaust. I believe that too.