

A New Brother

Mom was a member of the Hitler youth. Which was not that unusual for a 12 year old girl in 1941 Nazi Germany. Devastated when the party's atrocities came to light after the war, she moved to Bellaire, the Jewish section of Houston, to explain her point of view directly.

A labor organizer, Dad's key point of pride was his 2" thick FBI file, a full inch larger than his father William's. William, born in Hamburg, was put in an American prison Camp in Texas for much of World War II. William's English wife, who disliked William generally, had turned him in due to his rants against Roosevelt. William finally made it out of the camp after Becker, a Jewish Jeweler who had been General Blackjack Pershing's driver, sent in a letter saying that if they locked up William, the might as well lock him up too; since William had said nothing about Roosevelt that Becker himself did not fundamentally agree with.

Dad was originally a communist, but time eventually mellowed him into something roughly resembling a Democrat. He once said that the only the only person who would vote for Bush had to have a memory about 5 minutes long. Not all Dad's views followed either party line however. For example, he would often look at me and say that he was neither pro-life nor pro-choice since, fundamentally, it took –years- to determine if a kid was worth keeping alive. Like many socialists he introduced me to, he was big on grand plans for all humanity, but had a tough time relating to individuals, like me, Mom and his own father. Desperate to impress his father, he always fell short in his own mind. The primary source of tension was that although William wanted Dad to finish school, Dad dropped out in the eighth grade. This made Dad very sensitive about his intelligence and lead to tensions between us as well. Once, after my SAT scores came in, he said "I bet you think you're smarter than me". My response, quick and ill considered was "Well, yeah!" One of the biggest mistakes I ever made. In the years that followed, he would recall the incident with increasing vehemence until I figured out the appropriate retort: "Dad, if I had known how upset that comment would have made you, I would have made it YEARS earlier". He never brought it up again. A long time later, after my own son had visited my father for a week, Dad said "You know, your son's pretty smart. In fact I think he's smarter than you." My immediate response was "Dad, all sons are smarter than their fathers". That finally put the subject to rest.

As a six year old boy relocated to Bellaire, I was not quite sure what a Nazi was, but apparently it was hereditary and involved daily beatings from neighborhood children¹.

So I had always hoped for a brother to assist in the situation. Big or small, he would have been a natural ally against the outside world. When I was 9, mom fulfilled that wish and brought home a little brother. Unfortunately, I had not recognized the fact that a 2 week old baby would not be much good in a fight. He didn't even have any teeth.

¹ I figured that if I got out of Bellaire, these problems would disappear. However, at an Evanston summer camp, I was viewed as a rebel, and in Berlin, birthplace of my mother, I was blamed for the firebombing of Dresden.

So when I turned 15, Dad mentioned that he had had produced a big brother with a woman from El Salvador and that we would pick him up from the airport that day.

As I had my mother's coloring, blond with blue eyes; he had his mother's: brown hair with brown eyes. We spoke briefly and he said "Wow, you sure talk fast for a Southern boy." I froze, and then responded.

"Oh" (wait 3 seconds)

"I forgot" (wait 3 seconds)

"You're from New York" (wait 3 seconds)

"Aren't you?" (wait 3 seconds)

"We southerners usually talk r-e-a-l s-l-o-w for y'all."

We then talked about his life. What was it like to grow up in New York? "Well, when I was little and people found out where my Mom was from, I got beat up a lot since they figured 6 year olds were recruited as members of the El Salvadorian Death Squads".

So. Maybe we could be friends.

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