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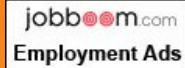
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By ALEX G. TSAKUMIS

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"My brother John died when I was 10 years old," he told me. "John was nine."

When I gingerly asked how much it affected him, he replied, "Affect me? Jesus, it did so much."

When another younger brother died some years later, the pain wasn't much less. Those were years consumed by fear and hunger, pestilence and strife.

When all of 12, he was captured by communist guerrillas. They took him into the hills and marked him for death.

Yet almost a month and a half later, having escaped and made the long journey back home, he appeared before the mother that had all but given up hope of ever seeing her oldest son again.

"She collapsed because someone in the village told her a couple of weeks earlier that I was killed," he said. "I have never seen anybody pass out like that ... I have never seen anyone cry that hard. We lived a tough life, my son."

Evidently.

On Sunday he will celebrate his 43rd Father's Day and not without some well-earned fanfare.

He's never been one to crave attention, or manage it particularly well when it came. A mostly quiet, intensely private man, who has enjoyed 52 years in Canada, reminded me that when he arrived, he was \$50 in debt from the trip alone.

He was always a hero, in many ways. I wanted to be just like Dad.

But I had my own ideas, too, of what I wanted the landscape of my life to look like. He wanted a lawyer and I lived to be the cobblestone philosopher to my friends.

I wanted to stay in school forever: Reading poetry, reciting Shakespeare, living a beautiful life, thickly drunken on youth. Often, just thickly drunken.

I wanted every beautiful woman in sight.

"You might not look like you do today," he once remarked, with some sense of foreboding. "What the hell are you going to do then? You can't make a living being a playboy."

Did I mention he was almost always right?

He ferociously grew his business and I foolishly let go of him for a while. Being the son of an immensely successful father is always rife with problems. You're judged, painfully so. You take umbrage, frequently.

When we started to disagree, it became obvious that the hero worship dissipated, replaced only with resentment.

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He was always working.

I'd recall how I often looked for him on the sidelines in years past, at my games, hoping he'd be there, praying he'd be there.

I wanted him to be proud of me, as much as I was of him. I wanted to hear it, just once.

We worked together for some years, well before I evolved into a writer. I insisted we risk, while he demanded we stay the course.

"You will see many of your so-called friends fail over time. Do you want to be like them?" he shot back angrily. "If you ever fail, do this because you were honest ... not because you were stupid. An honest mistake is easier to correct."

Well, I made my errors and took life's falls, but I could have never survived them without my Dad: A complex man to understand, but an easy man to love.

It took us many years to appreciate one another. I named my son after him. In return, Dad tells everyone (except me) how great he thinks I've become.

My uncle Peter, who is one of the finest men the world will ever know, said it best not long ago, "You know why you and your old man can't always get along? Your mother once said that you're exactly the same. You and my brother might both be brilliant, but a little nuts too, you know..."

Each week Dad reads this column with zeal, and will call with his thoughts.

"You're too hard on the premier." "What happened to your friend Gregor?" "Can't you find smaller words?"

So you will forgive a son's pride, that, for just this once, I've written a column for me. And I'm dedicating it to my Dad for Father's Day.

I love you, old man.

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