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Letter to the Reader

With "The Kitchen," I mainly tried to tell the story of my father's influence on me growing up through Bechdel's stylistic lens. I tried to paint a picture of how he shaped me overall, the nature of our relationship and how I view him and what he taught me now as opposed to when I was younger and more easily impressionable. I studied Bechdel's style closely, how she recalls key events and depicts scenes from her memory. She lets many of her images stand on their own, yet they often seem to clarify or further exemplify what the text suggests or references in passing. She frequently uses text to delve deeper beneath what may be going on visually, and at times comments on happenings in her own natural, more casual literary voice.

Talking to my father about his past and about my early upbringing (what I could not recount myself) proved to be a vital component of the research for this project. I knew his story, but he provided me with valuable insight I would otherwise have ended up lacking. My mother also served as an aid to my research, and it was generally useful just to get her words on my father. Though I found it difficult to accurately imitate Bechdel's narrative style in such a condensed form, I believe I have successfully captured both the literary pacing and feel of Bechdel's *Are You My Mother?*

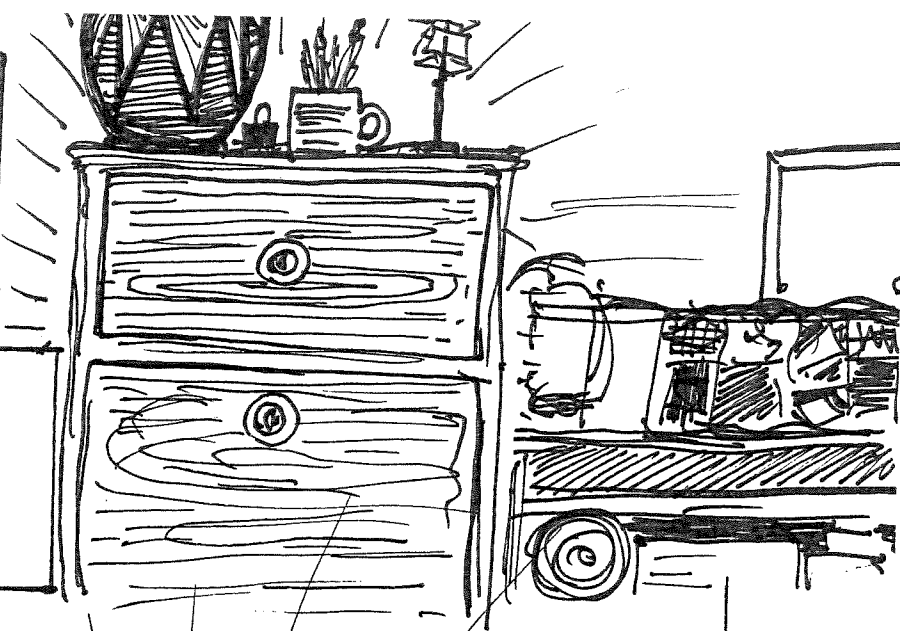
"THE KITCHEN"



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I STUMBLED UPON IT
IN A DRAWER IN MY
FATHER'S STUDY...

... IT LAY THERE,
BETWEEN HEAPS OF
SWEATERS AND
UNMATCHED SOCKS...



... THE MASK...



... IT WAS DUSTY, A LITTLE
CHEAP LOOKING, NOT QUITE
AS REAL AS IT ~~HAD BEEN~~
HAD BEEN WHEN I FIRST
MADE ITS ACQUAINTANCE...

... THAT I REMEMBERED
CLEARLY...

MY FATHER HAD
JUST RETURNED FROM
THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC...



... HE RETURNED WITH A
GROTESQUE MASK. IT HAD
BEEN CRAFTED WITH HUMAN
HAIR AND HUMAN TEETH...

... OCCASIONALLY, ONE OF
MY BROTHERS OR I WOULD
GET A SURPRISE VISIT FROM
THE SATANIC-LOOKING "BEAST"
IN BED AT NIGHT...

... OR IT MIGHT
CHASE US AROUND
CATCHING US BY SURPRISE
ONE AFTERNOON...

... MY MOTHER
USED TO SAY
THAT IT WAS
A CHILD BEHIND
THAT MASK, THAT HE
HAD A "YOUNG SOUL"...

... HE'S
YOUNG AT
HEART...



THE WAY MY FATHER
WAS SO PLAYFUL AND
FUN WITH ME AS A CHILD
MADE ME WONDER
LATER ON...

I ASKED MY MOTHER
WHAT MY FATHER'S FATHER
WAS LIKE TO HIM
GROWING UP...

I THOUGHT, "HE
MUST HAVE BEEN
AS PLAYFUL AND
FUN AS DAD..."

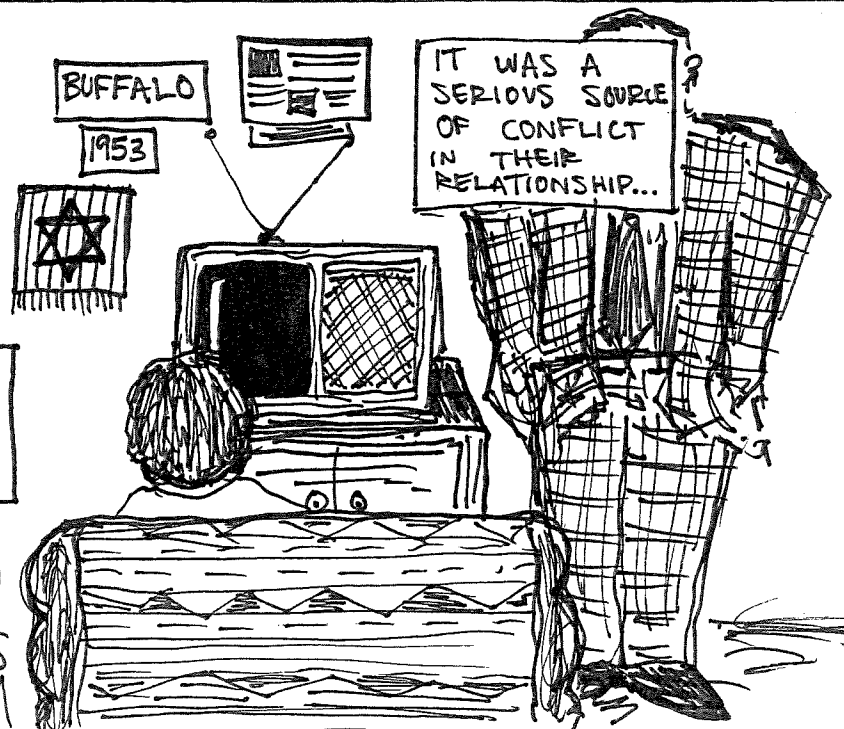
DAD'S DAD
WASN'T SUCH
A GOOD DAD...
I'LL JUST SAY
THAT.



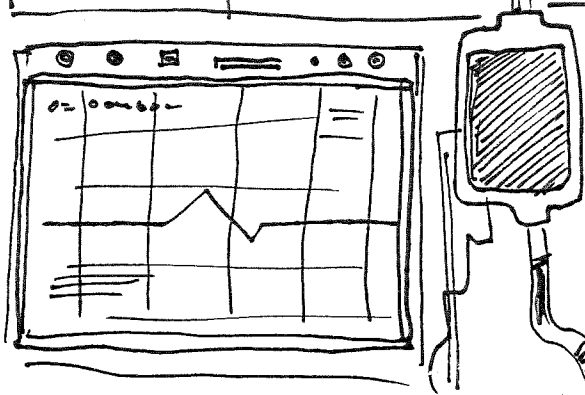
MY FATHER'S DAD WAS A
EUROPEAN IMMIGRANT AND
A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR.
HE DID HIS BEST TO
RAISE MY FATHER JEWISH.

MY FATHER, CONTRARILY,
DID EVERYTHING HE COULD
TO ASSIMILATE. HE HATED
TRADITION AND RELIGION.

HE DID NOT
RAISE
ME OR MY BROTHERS
RELIGIOUS...

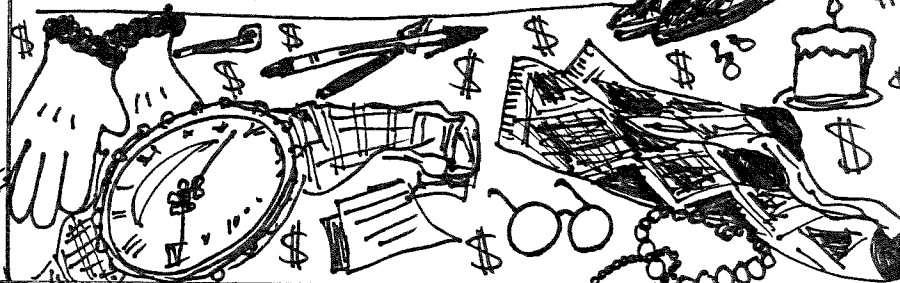


MY FATHER RARELY SPOKE POSITIVELY OF HIS OWN FATHER, EVEN AFTER HE DIED IN SURGERY...



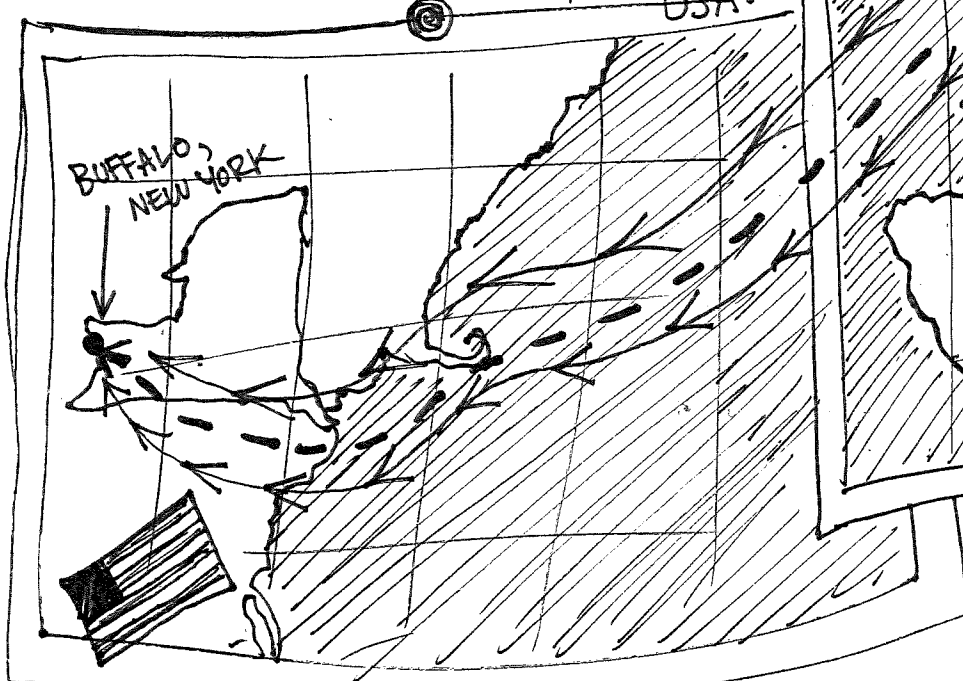
THERE WAS A COMPLIMENT HE ALWAYS PAID HIM THOUGH.

MY FATHER SAID HE WAS AN INCREDIBLE SALESMAN; HE HAD THE "GIFT OF GAB" AND COULD SELL ANYTHING



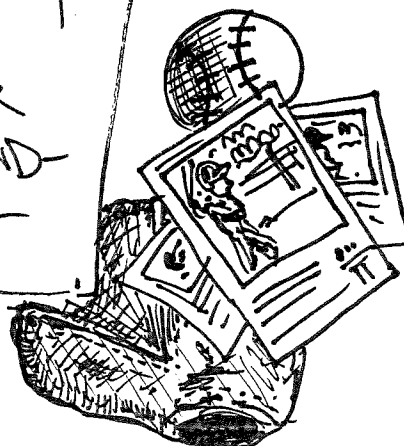
WHEN MY FATHER WAS 5 YEARS OLD, 1951, HIS PARENTS, AUNTS, AND UNCLES LEFT GERMANY FOR THE USA.

1951



IT WAS IN BUFFALO THAT MY FATHER FELL IN LOVE WITH THE THINGS HE HAS NOW COME TO STUDY: BASEBALL AND INDIANS

THEY LIVED IN BUFFALO, NEW YORK, SENDING MY FATHER TO A NEARBY JEWISH SCHOOL AND WORKING STEADY JOBS, MY GRANDMOTHER AS A CATERER AND MY GRANDFATHER AS A RETAIL SALESMAN.

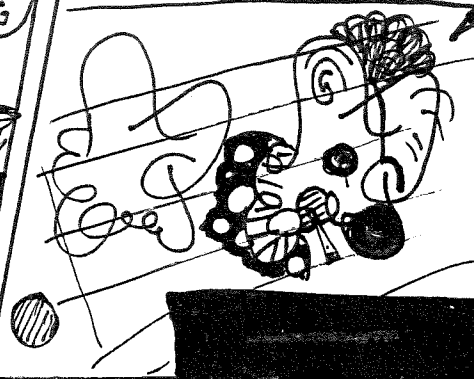


PERHAPS BECAUSE HE WAS AN ACADEMIC, MY FATHER OFTEN PUSHED ME TO BE CURIOUS, TO BE CREATIVE AND ENGAGE THE WORLD...



IF YOU'RE "BORED" THEN YOU'RE BORING

HE WOULD DRAW AMORPHOUS SHAPES AND ASK ME TO FINISH DRAWING THE PICTURE



NOW, IT SEEMS A LOT OF WHAT HE TOLD ME AND SHOWED ME AS A KID WAS TRAINING...

HE WANTED ME TO SEE EXCITEMENT WHERE IT HAD TO BE FOUND BY LOOKING TWICE,

TO BE CREATIVE ENOUGH AND INVENTIVE ENOUGH TO SEE POSSIBILITY ANYWHERE...

MY FATHER HAD A SAYING WHEN I WAS GROWING UP...



IT'S ALWAYS BEST TO SAY,

"THERE'S MORE IN THE KITCHEN."

HE NEVER ONCE EXPLAINED WHAT IT TRULY MEANT, NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES I ASKED...

BUT IT WASN'T ABOUT WHAT IT WAS REALLY "ABOUT"...

IT WAS ABOUT WHAT **I** HEARD, WHAT I INTERPRETED THE SAYING TO MEAN...

HE'S TOLD ME A MILLION TIMES THE STORY OF WHEN HE ASKED ME HOW MANY ~~DIFFERENT~~ MEANINGS OF "BEAR" I COULD COME UP WITH...

I GAVE HIM WHAT WAS, EVIDENTLY...



AN IMPRESSIVE NUMBER FOR AN 8-YEAR-OLD



IT'S ALWAYS BEST TO SAY,
"THERE'S MORE IN
THE KITCHEN"
WAS ALSO ABOUT HAVING
SOMETHING TO SIMPLY
NOT KNOW,

SOMETHING TO ASK QUESTIONS
ABOUT AND STRIVE TO UNDER-
STAND BETTER...

MY FATHER ALWAYS GOT THE ANGRIEST
AT ME WHEN HE THOUGHT I WAS
ACTING LIKE I "KNEW EVERYTHING"...

WHEN HE LOST HIS COOL AND
YELLED, HIS OUTBURST WOULD
USUALLY BE THE SAME...

"JUST LISTEN!"

ABOUT SCHOOL...
ABOUT WORK...
ABOUT ANYTHING...

I WAS HIS "LISTENER"...

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER,
HE WOULD DRIVE AROUND
AND TALK AND TELL
STORIES AND I WOULD
LISTEN WITHOUT A WORD,
~~HE~~ HE ALWAYS SAID
"STILL WATERS RUN
DEEP."

THE FIRST TIME MY FATHER TOOK
ME TO CHANG'S CHINESE RESTAURANT
AND JAZZ CLUB, I WAS IN 7TH GRADE

IT WAS TACKY AND
BIZARRE, BUT IT ALWAYS
HAD GOOD MUSIC...

SOMETIMES IT SEEMED LIKE
AN EXERCISE IN "JUST
LISTENING"...

MU MOTHER OFTEN CRITICIZED
MY FATHER FOR MANY THINGS...

SHE SAID HE LIKED TO BE
"IN THE MIDDLE OF THINGS",
NEVER TO FINISH THEM...

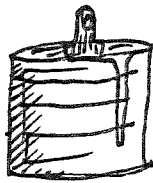
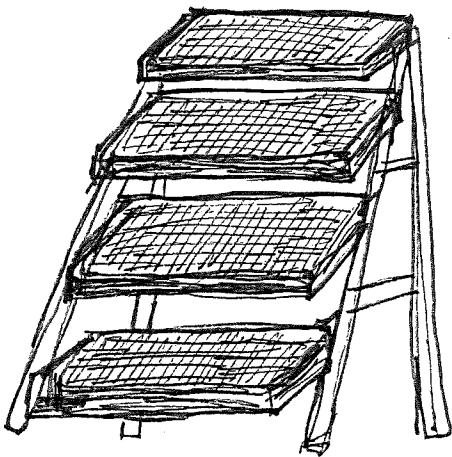
MY FATHER ~~IS~~ IS VERY PROUD OF THE
HOUSE.



HE SAID WHEN HE BOUGHT IT,
MY MOTHER THOUGHT HE WAS CRAZY.
IT WASN'T AS KEMPT AS IT IS TODAY.

IN FACT A LOT OF THE HOUSE IS COMPLETELY
DIFFERENT. MY FATHER WORKED ON IT FOR
OVER A DECADE...

IT'S HIS PRIDE AND JOY, AND
I CAN TELL WHEN HE TALKS TO
ME ABOUT IT.



AND WHAT'S MORE, MY MOM IS
RIGHT. IT'S A WORK IN PROGRESS,

AND IT'S GOING TO STAY
ONE UNTIL THERE'S NO
MORE CHILD BEHIND
THE MASK.