

Driving in the Back of Dad's Car  
Yizkor 2012

*Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt*  
*September 26, 2012*

Dan Zevin author of the book, "Dan Gets a Minivan" wrote nostalgically in the *Wall Street Journal* a few months ago about the rides he used to take in his dad's metallic blue Monte Carlo when he was growing up. He estimates he probably spent about half his childhood in that car. His father, who was a doctor didn't just drive his kids to soccer games and carpool, but also took his kids along with him in the car to a number of his appointments as well. Zevin looks back and remembers fondly all the time spent in the car rides. They were not just a means of transportation, or of arriving at a particular destination, but much more. He realizes it was a hallowed place where much more transpired in those car rides than merely getting from one place to another. It was the place where his dad dispensed precious pearls of wisdom and imparted meaningful advice and tidbits of philosophy. Whether they wanted to hear it or not, the kids were a captive audience, and his dad was clearly the captain in charge.

Being stuck in traffic, for example, would invariably be an opportunity to teach his kids the existential notion that, "In life, you will find there are always people ahead of you and people behind you." On the way to their tennis lessons, before getting out of the car, he would tell them, "Remember to follow through," always being sure to add, "and I'm not just talking about swinging a racket. I'm talking about how to succeed in the world."

Zevin longingly recalls those rides, and especially laments that even though he drives his kids to various places today, his children do not have the same experience. Instead of the bench they sat on in his father's car, his kids recline on thrones called captain's chairs, complete with extendible footrests. The very name, "captain's chair" would have been inconceivable in his father's day. There was one captain, and it was the driver, his dad.

He does not begrudge the comfort his kids know. The real difference that he laments is that they barely interact with each other, much less him. There is little conversation in the car. Although sharing space and going to the same place, they are each in their own individual world. The passengers in this traveling van are self absorbed – either on their cell phones, or texting, or playing portable video games or watching the dvd on the screen in front of them. Although the individualized activity has the advantage of cutting down on fights and arguments, something is clearly lost as the passengers are so docile. Not getting into fights or arguments is a reflection of the fact that siblings are much less engaged with each other today than in previous generations. The net effect is regrettably, he is not able to play the same role in the lives of his kids.

Earlier this morning I spoke about technology and how easily it can dominate, conquer and take over our lives, and I encouraged people to set aside their electronic devices today and on Shabbat, not because I am old fashioned, but to allow us the chance to interact with each other.

On this day of reflection and introspection, when we think about our lives and the direction they are taking, at the time of Yizkor we especially think back on our past. We think about and recall the loved ones who accompanied us and were with us on the journey of life, on the journeys we may have taken when we were younger. In these quiet moments we think about the parents who used to drive and

shlep us to wherever we were going, about the sacrifices they made on our behalf so we could become what we are.

When I was a kid I participated in oratorical contests, which were quite a distance from where we lived. My father would faithfully drive me to the practices and the competitions. Whenever he heard me speak in public or give a speech, he always liked to take credit for whatever oratorical abilities or gifts I may have, reminding me that he was the one who drove me to the meetings, practices and speech contests.

So today we think about those car rides with loved ones no longer here.

Some of us may think about the wisdom parents taught in simple moments, on trips, long and short, and even the annoying things, tired aphorisms and trite advice they would repeatedly tell us. Not every relationship was ideal or perfect, but what we would give to be able to hear their voice one more time, to be able to ride with them one more time.

Some of us may be thinking at this time of Yizkor of siblings with whom we may have shared that bench seat in the back, those who sat next to us on those rides, our sparring partners. We may have wrestled with them to pass the time, to get a sibling in trouble, or to gain our parents favor and attention. We may think of friends or companions, or spouses who were our co-pilots, who sat next to us and with whom we traversed, traveled and navigated the path of life. Sadly there are those among us who remember at Yizkor the children who sat in the back who may no longer be with us as well.

The Yizkor service of Yom Kippur is a time of remembering, of thinking about the loved ones who are not here with us. We are here today to recall the yesterdays we shared with loved ones, and to lament the tomorrows we will experience without them. At Yizkor, at this hour consecrated to the precious memory of times shared with our loved ones, when we reconnect to our tradition, we affirm that we remember them. They are still a part of our lives, for they will always accompany us on our life's journey, wherever we may go.

*© Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt  
Congregation B'nai Tzedek  
Potomac, Maryland  
September 26, 2012  
[potomacrebbe@bnaitzedek.org](mailto:potomacrebbe@bnaitzedek.org)*