

## A Tribute to Alan Brown

by Fern Remeldi-Brown

March 24, 2010

If I were to choose three nouns to describe my father, they would be compassion, courage, and survivor. These descriptors are very connected for my father, Alan Andrew Brown, who was a survivor in every sense of the word, from the beginning of his life until his unexpected and all too sudden end.

He grew up a Jew in pre-Nazi Europe, and learned quickly, and at an accelerated pace, that to stay in the game, he needed to use his wits and as well as to garner strength in numbers. He also developed a keen sense of understanding for those less fortunate. An example of this is how he and his best friend Tomi would rescue kittens which were thrown into the river to drown. This caring for animals stemmed from, or grew into, a true love of animals, which he passed down to his children.

This example of drowning kittens being saved can serve as a metaphor for the many, many miracles that saved my father's life, from the time that the German Nazis entered his hometown, Miskolc, Hungary. The Nazis did not speak the native language of each country, so they hired *kapos* - bilingual guards - who would speak directly to the inhabitants. My father's first miracle of his life being saved was when a *kapo* literally told him repeatedly that he was two years older than he was - 18, not 16 - and, finally with clenched teeth, asked him, "Do I have to teach you how to lie?" To have told the truth would have meant certain death - being sent to the death camps, particularly Auschwitz, instead of the labor camps.

There are many other miracles that saved my father's life, but one stands out:

My father was fortunate to encounter Frau Rosa Schreiber, an Austrian woman who ran a general store on the outskirts of my father's final labor camp where he eventually reconnected with his own father. Rosa was a righteous gentile who risked her life, sneaking small amounts of food and medicine to my father so that he and his father might overcome the typhus and tuberculosis that was endemic in the labor camp. Sadly, these diseases overcame my grandfather, who died in my father's arms the day after the Russians liberated the labor camp.

My father did not forget the kindness that was visited upon him; rather, in turn he gave to others as a mentor, an educator, and a father who taught principles and values to the core. All of us learned right from wrong, and could not tolerate injustice or any unfair behavior.

Each of us took away a special part of his teachings: I developed a passion for teaching, working with international populations and languages, my brother Steve realized his calling as a physicist and a healer through his work as a biological research investigator, and my beloved late brother Dennis devoted his spare time to traveling and understanding the world through the lens of geography, photography, and politics.

One of the most important lessons that I learned from my father was when he first began to speak as a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust, and to link his experiences as a Jew with those of gay and lesbian peoples. As a lesbian, I was accepted by him, and when I chose my spouse, Ginny 27

years ago, he supported us and using a term coined by PFLAG, called her his daughter-in-love. For some years, he and I spoke publicly together as father and daughter, on the civil rights issues that touched us personally, noting the similarities we shared, which were many.

My father came to the United States as a 21-year-old orphan and a refugee with almost no English and almost no money, and from this meager beginning, developed the skills to receive *Phi Beta Kappa* in his junior year at City College of New York, to graduate first in his class of 2000 students, *Summa Cum Laude*, to eventually get his Ph.D. from Harvard Graduate School in Economics, and to become a full Professor with tenure. He was a very learned man, fluent in four languages, having first-authored ten professional books and countless articles, as well as having founded the international honor society for Economics, Omicron Delta Epsilon (ODE), which now spans 600 chapters all over the world.

Despite his accomplishments, he always exhibited wit and grace. To know him, you might not see his former suffering, but rather his trademark humor which always accompanied him in every gathering. Even as Parkinson's unfairly took his abilities in his later years, he remained stolid, never flinching, ever going forward. He owes much of his strength to my mother, Barbara - Bobby to all who know her well - who was patient, hopeful, and caring with him to the very last minute, showing love such as the true meaning of the word itself, always exploring the latest opportunities for physical mobility and medical advancement, to try to beat the odds.

Sadly, in the end, the odds beat him. His heart, wide as it was, could not sustain the disease that eventually stopped it. He now joins his parents, Erna and Sandor who were killed by the Nazis when he was just 16; my mother's parents, Dorothy and Harvey, whom he adopted as his own; my cousin Aileen, who left us too young from Hodgkin's Lymphoma; and my beloved brother Dennis, whose spirit is undoubtedly embracing my father's spirit as his spirit greets my father's entrance to the world beyond our view.