

**MEMORIAL DAY TURNS INTO A
FIRST FATHER'S DAY WITHOUT A FATHER
2011**

I have a Father's Day card that I can't send as I usually did. As an adult, I rarely spent Father's Day with my father because I was usually at the Clearwater Festival. So I was struck more that he died just before Memorial Day to make me realize that while his professional obituary mentioned his military service, it's not in the Times' narrative version, nor on my own tribute page to **Dr. Irwin D. Mandel**.

Yet according to my memory of what he told me, his military service greatly influenced his career, even though I know that remembered conversations can't be trusted. (His oldest friend corrected me that they hadn't met in primary school as I thought, but in Boy Scout hikes around Staten Island in junior high years, before going on to Boys' High and CCNY together).

I recall my dad saying he was very grateful that the U.S. Navy paid for his dental school education at Columbia University – he had to work very hard to slim down to the weight qualifications to be an officer during World War II. He got his DDS just in time to deal with the huge number of impatient demobilizing troops badly needing check-ups 24/7. GI Bill benefits made it possible for him to take over a practice while doing lab research (and later a GI mortgage).

Serving in the Naval Reserves, he got called up during the Korean War. Again assigned to a base in Newport News, VA, he was shocked by the poor condition of the teeth of the young men from the south, some who had never been to a dentist, and some bad enough to not qualify for service. He was inspired to change dentistry to prevention, not just in dentists' offices, but in insurance and government policies (including the first report of the Surgeon General on Oral Health that he helped coordinate), and for schools to expand clinical services. He was a leader of the Jewish War Veterans in Brooklyn, so it was ridiculous when he was accused of participating in a Communist plot for advocating fluoridation of water systems. While our family vacations always included visiting historic sites where he could point out that the displays of old dental equipment were not from the right dates in the past, one of his last consulting projects was on a long range dental care program for the future – planning for manned flight to Mars. He just about lived long enough for his professional dream to come true – that dental caries would be seen not as inevitable cavities, but as a preventable disease.

His experience with sailors going to and from war also dedicated him against war. He was active in The Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy, and my sister and I were the only ones in our NJ school whose parents refused to sign permission slips to have us fingerprinted for identification in case of nuclear attack during the Cuban Missile Crisis, when we were having duck-and-cover alerts twice a day as town-wide alarms rang. He insisted that civil defense was not the answer to mutually assured destruction.

He took me to my first anti-war demonstration, at the Washington Monument in April 1965 as I recall, when I was almost 14. I heard Coretta Scott King and the old Socialist Norman Thomas (who, I only later found out from a 2001 journal interview with my dad, was a hero of his father's, a "war-to-end-all-wars" veteran). But I was most impressed that my dad wanted to show that nicely dressed people of all ages were against the Viet Nam War, not just shaggy college students. The philosophical and historical education I got through the Ethical Cultural Society he dragged me to on Sunday mornings was intellectually superior to my peers' religious education, even as I came to feel that ritual and tradition also have a usefulness for emotional satisfaction through seasonal and life-cycle changes, and he did agree to read "A Prayer for World Peace" at my sons' B'nai Mitzvah. I am glad that in the last year of his life I got him to sit down and help me realize the Mandel Family History Project that has connected me with the far-flung descendants of all his father's siblings.

Though his help on science projects always got me good grades, he inspired me and my siblings to commit, instead, to the nonprofit sector. But he was proud that the now Avi the PhD carries on his zeal for chemistry, albeit in the new inorganic chemistry. But his own scientific impact is evident every night in a way even I can understand -- in those *CSI*-type TV shows where they take a cheek swab and use saliva for ID -- it was his research that made that possible. (The non-cooperation of the first species he collected specimens from -- cats--led to wariness of them the rest of his life.)

So it was that much more painful for my family to slowly realize that what greatly contributed to his last precipitous illness was the inability to safely swallow his own saliva. Even my mother the poet couldn't find a word beyond irony.

--Nora Lee Mandel