
FOR MY FATHER

Memories of my father

By Merle Lamprecht



***for my father
in praise of
our Father***

Contents

1. BOOKS OF ACCOUNTS	3
2. UNDER THE SCORCHING AFRICAN SUN	5
3. A VICTORIAN DISCIPLINARIAN	6
4. HANDBILLS.....	7
5. TWO SPRINGS	8
6. THE SHARE PRICES	9
7. COMING HOME.....	10
8. GARBATO.....	11
9. TITHING	12
10. THE SERGEANT-MAJOR	13
11. A LONDON PLAY	14
12. LOVE YOUR WIVES.....	16
13. A FISHER OF MEN	17
14. THE HARP	19
15. RUN RABBIT RUN.....	21
16. A NEW DRESS	22
17. MINISTERS.....	23
18. JUDGE NOT	24
19. THE FULL QUIVER	25
20. WOMEN	26
21. HEZEKIAH.....	28
22. BIBLE STUDY NOTES	29
23. THE SECOND COMING	30
24. MY FATHER IN CENTRAL PARK.....	32
25. STALIN.....	34
26. A THING OF GREAT BEAUTY.....	35

Creative Commons License

I. BOOKS OF ACCOUNTS

the books of account
are closed
nothing can be
added now
the line is
firmly drawn
you are there
to present your account
to him who
holds the books
and opened yours
in 1912

we know not
what he gave
save as your
threescore years
plus ten plus two
progressed
your credit grew
faithful in little
he later gave you
much to use

and now the
books are closed
and you are there
presenting
a life well spent
with every cent
he lent
accounted for

and that's all
that counts for
now

2. UNDER THE SCORCHING AFRICAN SUN

at forty
under the
scorching African sun
dad tugged in the rear
at Sunday school picnics
he was useful there
and in deacons' meetings
where he made his mark

at fifty
beside the Thames
head of a large company
with no time to spare
dad tithed
lessening the burden and birth
of a church back home
a church now
in its twenty-third year

at sixty
dad tired
of strikes and labourites
retired back home
he founded and fathered
a downtown church
sited at first
in a store

dad's neighbour
always lived
next door

3. A VICTORIAN DISCIPLINARIAN

I did not understand
my father then
when I was a teenager –
a typical twentieth century
Victorian disciplinarian –
my sister and I
left parties at ten
or heard hooting
at the gate

since then it seems
I have become
a typical twentieth century
Victorian disciplinarian

when I was just
seventeen
I met a young man
a theological student
older than I
and like Cinderella
it was late
when we returned
from our first date
only to find
dad relaxed in bed
you'd better decide
he said
that young man's
going to marry you

and he did
but I was
most surprised
at my dad

4. HANDBILLS

Durban steams
the days are drowsy
most retired men
are on their beds

but RW unlike
most retired men
is panting up the stairs
his legs are not
as good as
in his swimming years

he wears a hat
practical
but slightly odd
as he asks people
to the house of God

only twenty thousand
more to go
he says quite casually
before you know
he's done it
and asked the few
who come to tea

in time the few
become a hundred
a hundred hungry souls –
just as well
some men of God
set goals

5. TWO SPRINGS

two springs are given
with a summer
and a winter
in between

not all summers are green
nor winters sear
yet each year
we chose
what we shall plant
our gardens are our care
and every test we lose
fells fragile flowers
from the second spring

dad's barometer
was read in the
sunlight of your word
he did not water weeds
when he chose seeds
he sowed the best

so summer's storms
and winter's winds
were weathered
and the second spring
long looked for
has come

blossoming
bright
for ever

6. THE SHARE PRICES

it's not only
when you read
the share prices
or discuss the dollar's rise
that you will think of grandad

you say
he was so outstanding
something so valuable
lost

but as you have
his great brown eyes
and large head
his size
so too
what he said and taught
will stay with you

even when you would not hear it
it will speak straight
as when he stared at you
over his glasses
you won't be able to forget
how his life was run

it's not only share prices
that will remind you
of grandad, son!

7. COMING HOME

the war is over
I wave my flag
we won't listen
to Churchill again
my daddy, my daddy
is coming home

mummy won't be alone
there's chicken and peas
for dinner
my sister and I
have new
smocked frocks

I dance with delight
on the pavement
my daddy is coming home

yesterday my dad
went home
mum is alone
but precious in the
sight of the Lord
is the death of his saints

we wait
dad, we're coming home!

8. GARBATO

Garbato he called
the print that hung
in the London Salon
the one that was submitted
with eleven others
for his ARPS

my sister
sweet sixteen seated
at her 'cello
in sombre mood
sombre dress

it had something
it wasn't a snapshot
though it was simple
like other works of art

like other works of art
the work was hidden
five hundred negatives
painstakingly worked
not one less

his sermons
were like that too
simple as finished works of art
with that which lifts
them from the ordinary
yet they did not deviate
by jot or fittle
from the Word

it's not extraordinary
people heard

“Garbato” Italian musical
term meaning to play in a
graceful manner.

9. TITHING

tithing is problematic
if you don't
you either have
too little to spare
or too much
which makes
parting painful

but when he
had too little
or later too much
dad regarded tithing
as a non-negotiable principle
God's share
was God's share

and God took care
of the increment

10. THE SERGEANT-MAJOR

he had a clear
precise manner of speaking
polite but
rather firm and loud
when he wanted to
emphasize a point
which was often

he had been
a sergeant-major
in the army
refusing promotion
because the initial
pay was less
and he had his
three girls back home

but something of the
parade ground
intonation lingered
the authority
the decisiveness
the unequivocal direction

he used them
as your soldier too

II. A LONDON PLAY

on holiday in the fifties
my parents
sisters and I
went to see a
London play
at the start-
a rather risqué part-
my father
sergeant-major
in the war
stood up
puffing
grunting
commanded
loudly
come on girls!
out
we traipsed

in the late sixties
living in London
he gave
us tickets
for his
favourite show
I can still see
the fiddler
playing
on the roof

what shows
did you see
in London
asked a friend
on our return

none
I replied
I wasn't sure
what
I would see-

and I wouldn't
like to be
two-eyed
in hell

12. LOVE YOUR WIVES

I think Paul wrote
husbands
love your wives
because so many
don't
or can't
and it's the
one thing
wives want

it's something deep
not diamonds
or eating out
or birthdays

it's an attitude
that permeates each day
that gives great latitude
for doing things
another way

I've watch my parents
it's true
loved wives are happy
husbands too

13. A FISHER OF MEN

you've made your bed
you'd better lie in it
said his old Scots father
not unkindly
when he returned home
as a boy and said
yes, he would go
back to school
instead he left
Bulawayo
where the occasional
lion still roamed
outside the town
and started on the railways
London in a top hat
was a long way
from his native land
or the spanner
gripped in his greasy hand
but he made it

I won't marry you
she said
so he stoked
his way to England
thinking of her
with every shovel full
cycling across Europe
seeing her face
in every village square
and in the odd
unexpected place
he came back
proposed again
under the quiet old firs

and founded a family
in the fear of the Lord
like a patriarch of old

I will make you
a fisher of men
he said
first little fishes
those that swim
in Sunday school
perhaps he had
the most fun there
but there were others too
who will look after
those widows now?
who will care
for the old people
the ugly people

the people people
forget are people?

14. THE HARP

dad arrived home
from a business trip
with a gift for me
an antique Erard harp
unobtainable here
and needing much repair

it's only when
you see a harp in pieces
that you realize
what a complicated
mechanism it is
most of it hidden
in the Gothic column
or curving neck
rods, levers, pivots, plates, pedals
all in pieces
hundreds
on the
well-worn wooden workbench

dad cleaned each piece
meticulously
they were carefully checked
minutely adjusted
laboriously reassembled
it took half a year
of patient
sacrifice

being an engineer
wasn't only theory
with dad
he understood each part
had to be perfect

and in perfect
relation to the others
or the harp
would not play
things don't just happen

as man
and churchman
dad worked that way

15. RUN RABBIT RUN

run rat run!
bite that one
first at the finish
foul the play
anything goes today

here comes an innocent
can he run?
ha! he'll be out
with the gun
run rabbit run!

dad ran
because he had to
though innocent
he knew
rats remain rats
he ran with them
but was not of them

strange to say
he finished first

16. A NEW DRESS

I'd bought a new dress
I thought it was stunning
I thought I was stunning
I was only sixteen
it was black
with huge swirling
red cabbage roses

dad merely looked at it
a good- looking girl
he said
looks better in
something simple

a gentle and quiet spirit
is the adornment
our Father values

but it certainly
isn't the spirit
of 1984
or of
Eve's era either

17. **MINISTERS**

there were many ministers
in dad's long life
in different churches
in different places
one was a son-in-law
dear as a son

there were lunches
with young ministers
out visiting
there were dishwashers
installed for old ministers
there was preaching
done for tired ministers
there was money
for poor ministers

just before his heart attack
the new pension plan
for retired ministers
he had prepared
was accepted at synod

the effort cost him his life

but dad felt
men need ministers
ministers are men
so he
ministered to them

18. JUDGE NOT

judge not
dad said to me
a prim goody-goody
with platted pigtails

yet he got mad too
impatient with
people's procrastination
forgotten promises
impassioned with
slipshod workmanship
especially in God's service

even recounting the tale
always in great detail
brought him to boiling point
cool it, cool it
we'd say laughing
but he never did
even in retrospect

judge not
dad said that to me?
but he also said
I heard him often
poor fellow
poor girl
they can't help it

unlike me
poor girl
dad condemned deeds
not doers-
people are
Christ's prerogative

19. THE FULL QUIVER

he was a large man
and rather ungainly
when he danced
ring-a-ring-of-roses
on the lawn
or stood on his head
for his prancing grandchildren

I remember laughter
when he was around
country drives
tea and cream cakes
playing in the pool

he used to say
there were two of us
now there are seventeen
and it reached twenty-two recently
with the great-grandchildren

he was so happy
he was coming
to see us all
and the new three

one of his
favourite verses was
happy is the man
whose quiver is full
and his was
and he was happy

20. WOMEN

dad had definite ideas
about women
I suppose one
would have called
him romantic
although on a
certain level
he had no
illusions either

when I married a minister
my mum
thinking of me said
money is more practical
but dad
thinking of me said
every girl should
have a wedding
and I did
it was lovely
white in my memory
always

though he sang
hymns lustily
dad couldn't be
called musical
though he took
us girls to
concert after concert
and we cost him
a fortune in music fees
music, he said,
was necessary-
for girls

I think after
we grew up
he hardly ever went
to a concert
except perhaps
on a business date

dad had definite ideas
about women
he was neither chauvinistic
nor old-fashioned
he was just
Christian

21. HEZEKIAH

of all the things
I would wish
my children
to do

of all the things
my father
would wish
me to do

was done
by Hezekiah who

did what was right
in the sight of the Lord
according to
all that David
his father did

22. BIBLE STUDY NOTES

I see your
Bible study notes
only you
could have
printed them so

the punctuation
is peculiar
to say the least
yet there is
a certain
logic to it

and then the
ink you used
or should I say
inks
red black blue
a peculiar logic
there too
it makes me
laugh and love
you

and then there
are your
clear unequivocal capitals
you were unique

to God too

23. THE SECOND COMING

I remember my grandmother
and all her books
on The Revelation
she saw 1948
the state of Israel
she thought perhaps
she might live
to see him come –
she died in hope

I remember my father
when The Revelation
was an interest
of his mother
yet as he grew older
he too sought for signs
of Roman Empire
resurgent Babylon
he read the news
with this in view
he thought perhaps
he might live
to see him come –
he died in hope

I type his notes
the grip tightens
a real robot
talking in a
rebuilt temple
does not sound
far-fetched
in fact its
feasible in eighty-four
perhaps I shall live

to see him come

I must get

those notes done

the fourth generation waits

24. MY FATHER IN CENTRAL PARK

so you sat
In Central Park
like these men
staring at their feet
or glazed
beyond the people
on the paths
among the rose-beds
cameras slung

you faced retrenchment
of another kind
you did not want
promotion to the top
you'd sat atop the ladder
far too long

so they put
you out to graze
gave you a splendid
empty office
silent phone and fax
so you sat
in Central Park
waited, wondered
as the world went by
I am sure you prayed

and when those
six sad silent
months had passed
you set off
on the last lap
of your threescore
years and ten

you built a church
you preached the Word
the corporate world had gone
and those last years
so threatened by despair
were best of all
crowning a proud career

25. STALIN

when Stalin's tale was told
and he was forced
to turn the final page
his daughter wrote
of something terrible
a gesture full of menace
full of fear of death
a curse on all –
perhaps he caught
a glimpse of God

it was business as usual
for dad in ICU
in all that mattered anyway
he taught a young intern
the mechanics of the machine
he could not master
he prayed for the
man with cancer
in the next bed
he was tender
and cheerful with Mum
and prayed for us too

when his minister came
knowing full well
the import of the
following words said
I know that my Redeemer lives

man's most momentous moment
was met by dad
as just another day-
perhaps more hard-
of hope and trust

26. A THING OF GREAT BEAUTY

a life lived
victoriously
is a thing
of great beauty

it's only with
death's final polish
that the sheen
becomes apparent
illuminating all
who look on it

it has been
cut and rubbed
over long hard years
now nothing
nothing but its
bright beauty remains
and we
see it aright

polished
by the Master's hand
a life of beauty
is joy forever

