**What was your Dad like when you were a child?**

Fourteen years isn't a lot of time to get to know someone, especially if half of that time was before the age of reason. I didn't have a long time with my father, who died when I was 14. He is, and always will be, a bit of an enigma to me.

I have lots of questions I wish I could ask him. Why didn't he go to college, when his younger brother went to an Ivy League school? Why was he always strapped for money when he was a hard worker whose father was the prosperous general manager of a textile mill? Why did he live in his father's house his entire life and never own a house of his own?

I don't know the answer to these questions, but I remember him as a quiet and gentle man who rarely raised his voice. He had simple tastes and muted dreams. He was a child of the Depression who was grateful for what he had and satisfied with his lot in life. He knew that working as a mailman, he was a disappointment to his business executive father. I suspect that he heard from his father many times that he was not ambitious enough and not as “successful” as his brother. But this never seemed to bother my father. My primary memory of him was that he always seemed content. He never complained, even when life dealt him misery.

Angelo Joseph Terranella was born on December 7, 1918. The Spanish Flu was raging as he came into the world. World War I had just ended the previous month. His father was just 24 years old, but already was a supervisor at a velvet manufacturing company, one of the largest employers in Lodi, New Jersey.

My grandfather, Frank Joseph Terranella, was the prototype of the second generation of immigrant families. His father (my great grandfather) had emigrated from Campofelice di Fitalia, Sicily in 1891. My grandfather, however, was born in the Lower East Side of Manhattan and educated there. He was the first American in the family. He was the full-time translator and go-between for the family from an early age. His U.S. birth coupled with his immigrant-family work ethic and fluency in Italian made him invaluable to his WASP bosses who staffed their mills with immigrant Italians. He quickly became the Head Italian in Charge.

Because of my grandfather’s successes, my father grew up in an upper middle class household (at least by immigrant standards). My grandmother never had to do housework. They had a maid. My father grew up wearing expensive clothes and taking violin lessons. They even had a summer house, first at Lake Parsippany and later at Lake Hopatcong.

But for reasons that are lost to me, my father did not aspire to or succeed to this wealth. Although he lived in his father's house even after he married my mother, my father was never close with my grandfather. I think a lot of that had to do with the parenting style of the time that dictated children should be seen and not heard. Fathers were expected to be providers and not much more for their children. There was always a cool, almost arms-length relationship between my father and my grandfather, who lived upstairs. Sons of that era always had a much closer relationship with their mothers, and my father was a case in point. It seemed to me that my grandmother always was the go-between between my father and my grandfather.

But my father was not like my grandfather. He did not define himself by his role as a provider. He got joy from simple things like a sunny day fishing at the lake, a good home-cooked meal, and some good music. He particularly loved the Big Bands.

His family was all important and he made my brother and me feel that importance. He put his hopes in us. He wanted us to succeed in a way that he hadn't. I felt that from an early age. He would have been proud beyond words that his boys became a doctor and a lawyer.

The earliest memory I have of my father is standing with him outside of Passaic General Hospital in March 1957, shortly after my brother was born. He pointed to a window several flights up and there at the window was my mother holding my new brother, John. Afterwards he took me to Panama’s in Lodi for hot dogs and he let me play the jukebox. Back then most restaurants had a jukebox that you could play a song for ten cents or three songs for a quarter. I loved playing music from a young age and whenever I saw a jukebox I constantly pestered my mom and dad for a dime to play a song. In 1957, the song probably was Patti Page singing “How Much Is That Doggie in the Window.”

If I had to pinpoint my father’s passion, it was baseball. He loved playing it and he loved watching it. We watched the Yankees religiously. The voices of Mel Allen and Phil Rizzuto were as familiar to me as my uncles. But we didn’t just watch baseball. My dad took me and my brother out to the field next to our house and hit fly balls to us. We also played wiffleball in the backyard.

He took me to the old Yankee Stadium for my first baseball game in 1960. Before that I had only seen the stadium on our black and white television. Walking out and seeing the emerald green of the field for the first time on that day was like Dorothy opening the door to Oz. We sat in the outfield and Dad pointed out Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris. Mickey had a homerun that day.

I loved watching the Yankees with him. But my father knew that playing sports was not my passion, so when a co-worker of his had a Sears Silvertone guitar to sell, he bought it for me. I had never asked for a guitar. I had never dreamed of playing any musical instrument. But my father knew how much I loved music. So he not only brought home a guitar for me one day out of the blue, he also arranged for guitar lessons and drove me there every Saturday. I will be forever grateful for that thoughtfulness. I feel now that my father really knew me and what better gift could a son ask for from a father.

When I started playing with a neighborhood rock band we called The Medievals, my father was supportive. I needed an electric guitar to play with the band and again Dad came to the rescue. He found out that his cousin’s son had an electric guitar that he wanted to sell. So he took me over to his cousin’s house and bought me the guitar I needed. Later he would sometimes act as roadie when the Medievals had a paying gig.

As I was graduating from eighth grade in June 1967, I found out that my father had what was then called Lou Gehrig’s Disease, now ALS. It was then and now a fatal disease. What I didn’t expect was that he would not make it into 1968. He died in the early hours of New Year’s Eve morning at the age of 49.

The loss was unexpected because it had come so fast. I was numb and don’t remember ever crying then. But as I look back now, the few years I had with my father were idyllic. They say the good die young. Dying as young as he did, he was assuredly extra good. For a while I felt cheated because I didn’t get to have him around for guidance and support as I went through my teen years and young adulthood. But in time I came to cherish the few years I had with this true gentle-man.

My father served in World War II as an orderly on an Army hospital ship named the General W. F. Hase. Most of his service was in India and China. He received the Purple Heart. And so I want to close with one of my father’s favorite songs from the World War II era. He used to sing this song to me and its message is even more poignant now:

*You'll never know just how much I miss you*

*You'll never know just how much I care*

*And if I tried, I still couldn't hide my love for you*

*You ought to know, for haven't I told you so*

*A million or more times?*

*You went away and my heart went with you*

*I speak your name in my every prayer*

*If there is some other way to prove that I love you*

*I swear I don't know how*

*You'll never know if you don't know now*