

Telling my dad

Sometimes in life there are things that we want to do.
Sometimes there are things we have to do.
And sometimes there are things that we have to do, even when we don't want to.

Ken offered to go with me. To tell my dad.
No. I have to do this myself.
It wouldn't be right if Ken were there.

My hands gripped the wheel of my yellow pinto.
I drove from my apartment in the Valley,
To my dad's house. To tell my dad.
I practiced. Telling my dad.
Hi, Dad. I've decided to become Jewish.
No. Too direct. Sounds scary. Okay....
Hi, Dad. I wanted to tell you that I'm studying with the Rabbi.
I want to know more about Judaism.
Hmmm. That doesn't quite say it. I'm scared. I start to sweat.
I'm not even there yet.
Why am I so afraid?
I'm afraid I'll hurt him. I'm afraid he'll disapprove.
That he'll think I'm being pressured.
If I tell him, will our relationship change?
Will I still be his 'little girl'?
But I have to do this.
I drive on.

The car knows the way. Too soon, I'm almost there.
I'm in college. I study for tests all the time.
It's practically my job to know the answers.
But there's no textbook for this one.
I feel like I'm cramming for a test that I have no notes for.
I realize as I'm parking the car that I have no plan.
I have to tell my dad. I don't know how.

He's happy to see me. He's always happy to see me.
But he knows me too well, and as we go inside,
He asks me casually, "What's up?"
I take a deep breath.
I lean against the back of the couch, half sitting, half standing, and I start.
I don't remember what I said, it's still a blur.
A statement, a defense, a little pleading for understanding.
I stumble as I try to articulate my reasons for my decision.
I am unable to tell him how meaningful Judaism has become to me.

And finally, I say, "It feels like the right thing for me to do, Dad."

And then silence.

My heart pounds. I sweat. I forget to breathe.

Dad takes a deep breath, uncrosses his arms from across his chest.

And he starts to talk.

He's not mad. Good.

He's concerned. Understandable.

He's worried I'll become 'different'. Okay.

He's worried I won't fit in. Fair enough.

He's worried Ken and his parents have pressured me into this.

Whose idea was this? Have I been brainwashed?

I respond. It was my idea. I don't remember being brainwashed.

I worry that if I defend Ken and his parents, he'll be suspicious.

I reassure him gently. He still doesn't like all this, but he sees that I am determined. There is no fight left, but he still has one thing left to say.

"Honey, all the wars in this world have been caused by people fighting over religion. Organized religion is the cause of more death and suffering... It is a crutch for the weak, and a weapon for the powerful. Be careful, daughter."

I'm not a history buff. I don't need a crutch. I have no idea what to say.

I nod understanding if not agreement.

Silence.

He gives me half a smile, pats me on the shoulder and nods his head.

I'm still his little girl.

The conversation has ended.

I am exhausted, but I've done what I set out to do.

Perhaps it could have gone better; it could certainly have been worse.

Later, Ken asks me how it went.

I tell him it went fine. We came to an understanding.

✻

By Lisa Bock