

Back to Life



Well friends, it's been several weeks since this jewhungry author wrote anything on this here blog so it's about time I got to it.

The past 2 weeks have been a blur—a messy, difficult, exhausting but still with shades of sunshine and love blur.

My Papa (Grandpa) passed away on Tuesday, April 26th, at 5:30 am. After a few days in the hospital followed by about 5 days in hospice, my beloved Papa passed away. He was 87 years of age at the time of his death and to some, it wouldn't seem shocking to have a grandfather pass at that age but for our family, his passing really was a shock. The reality of our parents' and grandparents' true age is, at times rationally understood, but generally, not full comprehended. Though logically, I understood my Papa to be an elderly man—it's why we insisted our traditional, Orthodox Jewish wedding take place in the Southern Appalachian town they live in rather than have the ease of a kosher wedding in Teaneck, NJ.

However, it wasn't until we arrived at my Papa's bedside the Friday of chol hamoed that I realize just how old my Papa was. But I have to tell ya, even with the memories of the devastating and heartbreaking final days spent by his side, I will always remember my Papa as being larger than life in every possible way. He loved to tell stories (most notably, one about the best corn beef sandwich he ever had (corn beef being one of his last coherent requests, which my brother and sister-in-law brought up from Atlanta, before entering hospice) and his love of music and theater was passed down into every one of us grandkids. I don't know the type of man

my Papa was when he was my age but as a grandfather, he was loving and kind and attentive and truly enjoyed spending every second he could with us and I will always be grateful for that blessing.

Now, the stress of watching a beloved family member die is really enough for any one person but add the stress of trying to keep kosher during Pesach in a household that doesn't necessarily keep the same type of kosher and well, you got yourself a really obnoxious pickle. Confession time: Until my husband and I have the space and kids, we plan to spend every Pesach with his parents in Jersey. It's just easier.

It is by no means a value judgement on my side of the family.

It's just easier and I think this past Pesach proved that it's not just easier on us but on EVERYONE. I've said it before and I'll say it again; I didn't decide to keep kosher to alienate my family and friends but decided to keep kosher to live a more spiritually fulfilling life. I want everyone who walks into our house to feel like they can eat at our table. So, with that decision came tougher decisions—where to spend Pesach? It was a difficult phone call, having to tell Mom that Pesach would be a Jersey holiday for us, but to her credit, she got it and was supportive and I will always be grateful for that. However, here we were, not 6 months after that phone call, having to figure out how to feed everyone in Mom's kitchen during Pesach. And to my mom's credit, in the middle of everything else she was dealing with, the woman kashered her kitchen, brought out the plastic-ware and we did this thing.

It wasn't all hunky dory, don't get it twisted. It was frustrating at times. I mean, how much kosher for Passover bag n' bake chicken can one person eat? But it was my genius friend, Jackie, who made a point that completely allowed that frustration fly out the window. The morning of my Papa's death, as I was running errands for mom, I'm on the phone with my Jackie, just venting like we do, when she says to me,

“Whit, how amazing is it that in spite of that difficult conversation about not spending Pesach in Asheville or Atlanta, here is your Grandfather, bringing your entire family together and showing all of you that you can do this. What a gift.” Well if that didn’t just verbally slap me in the face with glory than I don’t know what will. My Jackie is a genius. And she was right. We had 5 days of Pesach, including one shabbat, with all my crazy family members in Asheville and we did it. Hell, My sister-in-law and I even created an amazing new soup using a Vitamix and every tomato in Asheville and it was damn good. There was a kosher for Passover mashed potato bar one night and even a quinoa pilaf (quinoa from Bolivia, thank you very much)! I mean, I don’t mean to brag, but we nailed Passover 2011. A fete I never would have thought possible. Thanks Papa.



Papa and Grandma dancing at my wedding - Aug. 15, 2010

Vitamix, Vitadelicious Tomato and Kale Soup

WHAT??

10 whole tomatoes, stemmed

a bunch of kale

1 large onion, diced

Olive oil

3 cloves of garlic, diced

4 cups of water

1 large russet potato, peeled

Salt

Pepper

Shredded mozzarella

Italian parsley

HOW??

Clean tomatoes and place into Vitamix in 2 groups of 5. Press on and watch it do its thang. Put aside.

Meanwhile, turn stove to medium high and heat 4 table spoons of olive oil in the bottom of a large stock pot. Add onions and garlic and saute until onions are translucent. Next, add the kale. Sautee kale for 2 to 3 minutes. Next, add all those tomatoes and the four cups of water. Bring the entire thing to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer and let cook for 30 – 40 minutes or until kale is good and soft. During the last 10 minutes of simmer time, add your peeled potato. The starch of the potato will help thicken the soup. Add seasonings as needed. Once done, serve hot (leave potato in the soup but don't serve it) and garnish with cheese and

parsley.