

Thoughts on Nagypapa

Becca Heller, 24 April, 2013

Much of my family is “computerly” or “mathematically” inclined. I tend to like writing and am majoring in NOT computer science, math, or engineering... but history and political science. And though that may not seem so typical of the Hellers, in reality I fit right in.

My first strong connection with any form of history, was sitting on my patio, the very first time Nagypapa told me HIS story. I listened for hours. We sat and talked. Well, mostly he talked. I listened.

His story, in the context of all of the “real history” I was learning in school and Hebrew school. It made sense. I understood not only the facts and series of events, which many people see history solely as, but also the why to history. History isn't about the treaties passed, the economic policies that influenced a political decision, nor about the cultural waves that changed a society. Though admittedly, that stuff is REALLY COOL.

It is much more than all of that... History is about communicating. Communication- a skill in which Nagypapa was an expert.

But it isn't just about communicating itself. Nagypapa was an expert at communicating a lesson. Yesterday, when sharing stories with my family, my aunt Karen pointed out that Nagypapa started sharing his story of the war only after he could explain it in the sense of a victor rather than victim. The message of perseverance and never giving up. Nagypapa shared this message with incredible strength and to thousands of people. Even his life after the war, working his way to the US, gaining admittance into MIT, working for IBM and teaching computers. His stories, his HISTORY, is that of courage, positivity, and perseverance.

So, in the non-Hellerly habit, I tend to write rather than compute. And in my writing and studying, I am learning to communicate as Nagypapa did. I love sharing stories, history or not, and communicating in the same spirit.

In a letter to Nagypapa recently I wrote:

“I have always credited a lot of my fundamental writing skills to my dad, but when it comes down to the essence of stories, it comes from you. I have always loved sitting down with you and listening to your stories about life, and in my writing, try to emulate your style of sharing and the lessons you took from your experiences. A button sits on my desk that says “you cannot control the events around you, but you can control how you react to them.” I have adopted this mantra, along with many others you have taught me.

I love you very much.

Through living Nagypapa's mantras, we continue his history, his communication, and his legacy of perseverance and love.