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This loving, insightful, well written, articulate, moving memoir by Mindy Fried, an accomplished sociologist, from the intimate perspective of a devoted daughter, depicts her (with her sister) authentic caregiving for their aging cherished and adored father, whose blessed memory comes alive through the sensitive recollections of his daughter’s book. The memoir demonstrates that the daughter’s actions have fulfilled the mitzvah, “honor your mother and father,” the fifth of the 10 commandments. That Mindy Fried was “there” for her father, emotionally and practically to the extent she was able, is a tribute also to her own character. The memoir allows the author to come to grips with loss and bare her soul even sharing dreams she had while giving care to her father, and looking into the eyes of the people she meets along the way. The author comments on the act of writing this book by saying, “In writing this book I suppose I have managed to keep him alive in my mind and heart, to internalize his essence so that I can carry on” (p. 156).

Elsewhere, Mindy Fried comments, “Writing this book allowed me to sustain my relationship with my dad- even though he wasn’t physically in the room- to work through some of the tough stuff, and to consider what, if anything, I had learned from my care giving experience that might be helpful to others (xi).” She offers much prudent advice for long distance caregivers on how to best care for an aging parent and how to handle this rite of passage in one’s own lives, from practical considerations of navigating assisted living and the health system, to reflections on what is the meaning, purpose, and ultimate significance of a persons’ life in a larger context. The practical lessons Fried has learned and shared in this memoir will be invaluable to those facing caregiving for a parent in their future lives. The author is sensitive to the needs of those receiving care who never want to be treated inhumanely as “an old person,” talked down to, treated roughly, or in an uncaring fashion (p. 50). Fried gives advice how to identify good doctors like Dr. Dave who
“listened with a nuanced ear to our father, learned about his medical status and more importantly was able to see him as a full person with a past, present, and future” (p. 88).

In so doing, Mindy Fried has honored the memory of her father’s many accomplishments as a labor activist- an outspoken champion of the working class advocating for fair wages, benefits, and fair treatment, and union organizer, an actor, writer, teacher, and unique individual who displayed grit, resilience, feistiness, strength of conviction, being fiercely independent, and drive. In his later life he courageously met health challenges such as macular degeneration, renal disease, pulmonary decline, and congestive heart failure with straight on.

His courage also manifests earlier in his life in standing up for his political beliefs when subpoenaed to testify twice before The House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in Albany during the red scare era of McCarthyism in doing what he thought was fair for the rights on behalf of oppressed, exploited, and vulnerable workers. Being labeled a red or pinko commie could land one in jail, cause one to be fired from work, and destroy marriages during the Cold War. Fried was blacklisted and thrown out of the Union only to find a job selling insurance with a Canadian firm willing to take a risk hiring him. Manny Fried wrote a memoir titled The Un-American. His defense of the vulnerable and oppressed is a Jewish value rooted in the bible to care for the underprivileged. Thus, although Manny Fried was a staunch atheist, he lived according to many Jewish tenants of justice. While he may not have believed in an afterlife, he achieved meaning through tangible acts with lasting value, such as touching the souls of students and leaving behind a large family, and making his mark through his dramatic art. It is a credit to Manny Fried that he stood up to McCarthyism and served as an outspoken champion of the working class. He was put under surveillance by the FBI for his left-wing political views. The author cites these FBI reports in her footnotes. As a result of the HUAC subpoenas, Fried did have trouble finding work, his family members were ostracized and lost friends, and later his theatrical dramas as a playwright were blacklisted. Manny Fried had briefly worked at Dupont and stood up for exploited labor. In Buffalo, Manny Fried served as an organizer for the Electrical Workers Union. The author argues that her father’s sense of justice to correct economic inequalities stemmed from his Jewish upbringing that emphasized the importance of mitzvahs (doing good for others, perhaps better identified as Tikkan Olam, the title of a book by Emil Fackenheim) based on a moral code of right and wrong. The author points out that during WWII many Jews saw the communist party as the
best way to fight fascism. These Jews became activists for issues like immigrant rights, consumer protection, housing, and worker’s rights (18). Speaking up and out against social and economic injustice thus was infused with Jewish precedent of a moral biblical prophetic subtext.

What impressed this reader the most about the author’s father Manny Fried was his autodidactic virtue. He earned a PhD in literature in his fifties as a late life student under the direction of literary critic Leslie Fiedler. Upon graduation he was hired to teach composition and creative writing at the local state college, thereby starting a new career when he was in his sixties. Age was not an impediment to his dreams.

Manny Fried’s own plays and activity in the theater was art with a purpose that affirmed the dignity and worth of all persons despite class, social, economic, racial, geographic, and cultural differences. Like Arthur Miller’s *The Death of a Salesman* and Clifford Odets *Waiting for Lefty* there is a social conscience in Manny Fried’s dramas to fight for the rights of working people. His two dramas *Boilmakers and Martinis*, and *The Dodo Bird*, speak to class differences. The author’s father also wrote a memoir titled, *The Most Dangerous Man*.

Theater for the author’s father also created community and belonging, and many of his theater friends visited him and went to restaurants with him when he was older. Fried was not afraid to explore theater for asking tough questions about domestic violence, workplace issues, and aging. This was theater for change.

The author, Mindy Fried, asks herself tough questions worthy of consideration for all, such as:

- How can we help our parents get the most out of their lives until the end and ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect by friends, family, and professionals?
- How do we handle this rite of passage, this chapter in our lives as adults, as we sort out the multitude of options, or for some the lack of options, around where our parents will live, how they will get through each day, and how they will die?
- How can we juggle their care with our other obligations or, should I even even venture to say, desires in caring for our own children, being present and available for our friends, and often last on our list, taking care of ourselves?
- And how can we maximize the effectiveness of support- be it from friends, family or professionals- so that our parents live their final days feeling loved and cared for? (p. 6)

The book tells a collective story about the adult caregiving experience and identifies some of the steps towards seeking quality end-of-life care for adult parents. However, the act of writing for the author also involves her own personal journey to deconstruct the complexity of her relationship with her father and discover things about herself (p. 7).
The author taught classes in feminist theory at Tufts University in Boston (p. 102). She writes,

my mother was part of a generation of middle and upper-middle class women who had strong aspirations that were largely squashed. They were caught between two women’s movements, the suffragettes of the early twentieth century and the second wave of women’s movement of the 1970s, with no organized ‘sisterhood’ of women supporting them to step out of the kitchen” (p. 20).

Fried’s mother was a gifted painter. She often painted portraits of the working class, such as waiters and laborers, as well as family portraits. Her lack of opportunity in the field of art and the stifling of her own voice led the author to explore feminist thought. The daughter saw the injustice of her mother not being taken seriously as a women and artist. Her mother’s favorite artist Mary Cassatt is quoted as saying, “There’s only one thing in life for a woman: it’s to be a mother. A women artist must be…Capable of making primary sacrifices.” (p. 21). In art school unlike male students, women could not use live models. Mindy Fried writes:

In an era when women’s voices were not heard, being a women artist was revolutionary. My mother’s life like so many women of her generation was one of sacrifices. Perhaps this was a vestige of the Victorian era when it was considered proper for upper-class girls and women to dabble in the arts, a place for talented and creative women who were denied access to so called professional careers (p. 22).

Fried writes that her mother intuitively understood that there was gender bias. Her mother was trying to grow as a painter at a time when society didn’t value the work of women artists. Women were expected to have dinner on the table every night. The author notes that through her involvement in the Women’s Movement of the 1970s she began to discover her voice (p. 25). The author also notes that during her caregiving for her father, knitting became therapeutic.

The only caveat with the book is that it may have been enhanced by citation of philosophic texts that treat aging, death, and dying. Such texts include the existential meditation on illness, aging, and passing on, by Holocaust survivor Jean Amery, *Ueber das Altern* and Franz Rosenzweig’s *Buchlein vom gesunden und kranken Menschenwerstand*. In fact, the discipline of philosophy has always sought to take the sting out of death and prepare one to face death with a heroic stance as when Socrates willingly accepts the states verdict to drink the hemlock.

On pages 121-126, the author recounts her religious ancestry from Poland and Hungary, and notes that they experienced discrimination because they were Jewish and poor and came to America for religious freedom and economic prosperity. But, over the years there was a sliding away from the religious aspects of Jewishness. She writes, “Each successive generation is one more step away from their heritage an yet most have tried- in their own ways- to maintain a connection to their
history as Jews” (p. 125). If the author had explored in more depth the Jewish religious views on filial obligations to parents and death and dying, she might have discovered a rich and substantive body of text on the afterlife seen more than as a crutch or comfort to emotionally brace a person, but rather as a living force and reality. The author does comment that her father was always a proud Jew:

My father was an atheist but he was brought up in the Jewish Orthodox tradition. We knew that the last thing he would want was a traditional Jewish funeral. But he was proud to be a Jew and we knew that he would be happy to be buried in accordance with Reform Jewish principles as long as we didn’t get carried away! (152)

The lack of philosophical and religious perspectives on ageing is not to say the book is not scholarly or lacks or suffers deficiency. It is true to its stated scope and aims. Academic scholarly sources are cited for they are as when the author marshals many secondary academic citations to the sociological literature on gerontology and government reports and agencies such as the US census Bureau, National Alliance for Caregiving an AARP, National Center on Assisted Living (NCAL), and other health policy research, etc. that have studied aging in America. In fact, the author has taught courses in the subject from a sociological perspective, one notably at her alma mater, Brandeis University where she wrote her dissertation on parental leave policy and workplace culture because she wondered how the majority of workers in the US dealt with taking time away from their jobs when a new baby arrived. Her research however extends to focus on workplace issues from a sociological perspective (p. 111).

This book will be of interest to feminists, historians of theater and the working class, labor movements, autobiographical writing, creative writing, to name just a few disciplines.

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1 See http://libguides.tourolib.org/10comm
2 See http://libguides.tourolib.org/afterlife
5 http://libguides.tourolib.org/afterlife