

Janice A. Walker- Fun Home by Alison Bechdel
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Family Values

Alison Bechdel's Fun Home is a tragicomic based on her life growing up in what appears to outsiders as a respectable, hardworking American family. As you read you learn quickly this family is far from typical. The one frame which speaks to me comes from page 123. Bechdel has a dream that occurs two days before her dad Bruce passes away. They're out at the bullpen and she can see through the trees that there is a spectacular sunset and so she beckons for her father to join as she runs barefoot up the hill. At first he ignores her; then follows, but when he gets there the sun has set and the luminous colors are gone. Her disappointment is expressed all over her face and she says "You missed it! God, it was beautiful". He just stood there with this silly look on his face. This dream embarks upon how many events and situations Bruce missed or failed to explain throughout his daughter's upbringing. The dream also implies some of the beautiful moments Bechdel did share and imagined sharing with her father. This dream was a true indicator of the relationship she had, to say the least a bit of an emotional roller coaster.

Some examples of how Bruce interacted with his family, and how it affected Bechdel are when the family went to church; Bruce would stay back and sunbathe. When Bruce took the time to play baseball, what Bechdel describes as "Lethargic affairs" (p.91) things quickly came to a close when the ball rolled near the perennials. What kind of man but a sissy could possibly love flowers this ardently? (p.90). Bechdel couldn't stand flowers

and yet was made to care for them all the time. His love of gardening seemed deeper than his love for his family. Flowers were everywhere, in and outside of their home. What a total reminder of who and what her father really was. Bruce's favorite flower was the lilac. Bruce began reading a novel a year before he dies by Proust called "Remembrance of Things Past" describing the lilac as "A tragic botanical specimen, invariably beginning to fade even before reaching its peak" (p.92). I wonder if she related to the lilac; or maybe even saw her father as a lilac, so temperamental and fragile and not able to really be who and what he really wanted to be before dying. There is irony in the fact that the lilac is so beautiful and aromatic, but yet so flimsy with such a short life span.

Bechdel describes occasional times when her Dad would play "airplane" with her and even though it was uncomfortable to be propelled in the air by his feet into her stomach, it was well worth the rare physical contact. His obsessive compulsion to restore their home and keep it clean was fanatical, and a simple game of airplane would turn into a chore of vacuuming before the game could begin. Bechdel states that she and her brothers were free labor and an extension of his body, like precision robot arms (p.13). Did Bruce have a family because that's what society and Catholicism expects from men? Even though they weren't a physically expressive family; once Bechdel was moved to kiss her Dad goodnight and ended up grabbing his hand and bussing the knuckles lightly as if he were a bishop or an elegant lady (p.19). It must have been awkward to be unable to express love physically with your parents, and may have been a catalyst for Bechdel's relationship and personal developmental issues. She goes on to talk about his bursts of

kindness which were as incandescent as his tantrums were dark (p.21). He seems to have characteristics of bi-polar disorder or some other mental disorder.

It could be argued that a dysfunctional family is better than a broken up family, and Bechdel proved despite the odds against her, to be an accomplished writer. “Was he a good father?” At least he stuck around (p.22). Yes, in deed he stuck around until the day he was called by a higher power, and indeed he had a huge hand in how Bechdel grew to be the brilliant writer she is today. Throughout the many strange episodes Bechdel lived through, in many odd ways Bruce helped her to explore her sexual identity. Bechdel says the bar is lower for Fathers than Mothers (p.22). Yet, her memories with Bruce had far more impact on her life than any of her memories of her Mother. Even though many of her early childhood experiences with Bruce promoted femininity and heterosexuality, as an adult Bechdel chose an open homosexual lifestyle and ultimately this may have helped her accomplish the career successes she’s made so far.