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My Father at 90

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my Father • AT • 90

Dan Schwarz

"I have never been confused in my life," I heard this frail, bent man, my father, say when I told him I had gotten lost driving from Tampa to Bradenton.

Our body language speaks our differences.
His eyes eagerly seek approval which I,
Haunted by recurring nightmares, grudgingly withhold.
No sooner do I warmly kiss my mother,
than I back up warily when he leans to kiss me,
as if still desperately trying to keep him out.
I am frozen in memory, an awkward boy
dwelling in his weird house of outrageous generalization,
bathing daily in his critical loquacity,
quivering again before threatened physical wrath.

Metamorphosized into a
shrunken, wizened old man,
garrulous, deaf, complaining about infirmities
without knowing what they are,
proclaiming once
more his intention to live past a hundred,
he will always be
large man, physically threatening,
bullying with corrosive, acerbic remarks,
harping on my inadequacies,
scolding, blaming, whining—and I
the fearful confused boy
reduced to screams for help that go unanswered.

Wandering in stained labyrinth of past,
Now in my sixties, well along in my own death walk,
living for decades with fear of replicating my father's errors,
fretting about rejection from my own children,
fearing detritus of guilt when he dies,
knowing that deep, festering wounds
prevented my being ministering
son I might have been, I tremble,
wondering how his ashes will shadow me.