

## FHS COMMENTS 2016 6

**COMMENTS TO AUTHOR:** I felt this essay has considerable merit. It has high relevance for our journal: it describes how illness in the family (in this case, a genetic condition in a child) intersects with personal, cultural, and religious parental histories (mother's and especially father's different responses to their daughter's illness). I also appreciated the acknowledgment that, when parents are helpless to alleviate the child's suffering, the apparently omnipotent physician can become a surrogate role model. The historical specificity of the narrative, at least for me, grounds it in a powerful time and place. At the same time, it evokes questions about how terrible trauma reverberates throughout the course of an individual's life (and into future generations) in ways that are pertinent to many other trauma-related situations, so the essay does have application beyond its distinctive particularity.

The writing is well-crafted overall. The story is well-told and with a minimum of telling (vs showing). The insights about the father's survivor guilt and ambivalence about parenthood are especially revealing and worthy of contemplation. I have one overall criticism which in my read lessens the effectiveness of the story. While the father's anguished, unresolved soul-searching is well-portrayed, both mother and daughter come across as rather two-dimensional. A chronic medical condition in a child (added to the complexities of relationship with a Holocaust survivor) certainly could create almost unbearable stresses in a marriage. But was the marital relationship as hostile and dismissive as is described here? Could the mother character be a little more nuanced? Similarly, the overreliance on the narrator's part (and remember, this is the father's voice) to continually describe his daughter as sweet, little, precious, beloved gives lie to the complexity of his feelings and oversimplifies the relationship. When the daughter coos, "You're so strong, Daddy," it comes across as cloying rather than touching. Of course she loves her father, but were there other feelings present as well? Did she in fact feel safer with her mother, who seemed to manage everything so competently? The use of the term "daddy" rather than the more formal "father" that one might expect from the relationship as described also grates a bit. If indeed the child's attitude toward the father is one of unalloyed hero worship, does the father not wonder at this, and perhaps feel unworthy? I recognize that the focus of the essay is on the father; but I think if we could see these other two characters with a bit more depth (just a sentence or two added to bring them forth in all their human complexity), the essay would be more compelling.

**COMMENTS TO EDITOR:** To be transparent about my positive bias, as a Jew myself, the topic of Holocaust survivors and their coping is of inherent interest to me, so I might have found this essay more involving than some others. That being said, from as objective a position as I can muster, I think it has merit. I thought a lot about its appropriateness for the journal, and came down on the side of fairly high relevance: the essay describes how illness in the family (in this case, a genetic condition in a child) intersects with personal, cultural, and religious parental histories (mother's and especially father's different responses to their daughter's illness). There is even a nod to how, when parents are helpless to alleviate the child's suffering, the apparently omnipotent physician becomes a surrogate role model. So all of this is to the good, and the historical specificity of the narrative, at least for me, grounds it in a powerful time and place. At the same time, it evokes questions about how terrible

trauma reverberates throughout the course of the individual's life (and into future generations) in ways that are pertinent to many other trauma-related situations, so the essay does have application beyond its distinctive particularity.

The writing is pretty good overall. The story is well-told and with a minimum of telling (vs showing). The insights about the father's survivor guilt and ambivalence about parenthood are especially revealing and worthy of contemplation. I have one overall criticism which in my read lessens the effectiveness of the story. While the father's anguished, unresolved soul-searching is well-portrayed, both mother and daughter come across as rather two-dimensional. A chronic medical condition in a child (added to the complexities of relationship with a Holocaust survivor) certainly could create almost unbearable stresses in a marriage. But was the marital relationship as hostile and dismissive as is described here? Could the mother character be a little more nuanced? Similarly, the overreliance on the narrator's part ( and remember, this is the father's voice) to continually describe his daughter as sweet, little, precious, beloved gives lie to the complexity of his feelings and oversimplifies the relationship. When the daughter coos, "You're so strong, Daddy," it comes across as cloying rather than touching. Of course she loves her father, but were there other feelings present as well? Did she feel safer with her mother, who seemed to manage everything so competently? If indeed the child's attitude toward the father is one of unalloyed hero worship, does the father not wonder at this, and perhaps feel unworthy? I recognize that the focus of the essay is on the father; but I think if we could see these other two characters with a bit more depth (just a sentence or two added to bring them forth in all their human complexity), the essay would be more compelling.