

PORTRAITS OF OUR FATHERS

A first father

Dinner time. Father is cooking fish in the kitchen. Smell all over the place. Mother helps. Salad mostly. Arguments over the spices. I'm in between. Then shouts coming from the kitchen.

Later. Living room table. Well prepared, beautiful plates. In addition to the food, bowls filled with nuts and other salty stuffs. Gianna Nannini on the LP player. Eating. Joking.

Later. Dishes put aside. The salty bowls remain. More LP music from a forgotten singer.

Bed time. Bed time and father leaves. Good night and see you some day.

A second father

I was 9 or 10. One milk tooth was on the leave and it was moving a lot but it wouldn't decide itself to fall. I was toying with it during the dinner, using in turn my tongue and my finger. My dad kept silent during the whole meal. At one point he stopped eating and looked at me. He waited a while, enjoying the effect of suspense he systematically created through this technique. Then he said very seriously that when he was a young boy, his mother used to attach one end of a string to the loose tooth and the other end to a door handle; that then his own father would open the door.

I was shocked, probably green. And my dad started laughing. Then he left the table.

In the evening the tooth finally fell, maybe out of fear of being pulled off. I went to sleep, dreaming of the great present that would pop up under my pillow during the night. In the morning, in the place of the tooth I found a book. It was called "*friends of the woods*" and basically contained all the tricks one needs to survive in the forest. There was especially a whole chapter on how to build sheds. I ran with my sister to our dad and asked him if we could built a hut all together. He said "yes", but that we had to wait until the next weekend. A week is so long at 9 or 10 years old.

Eventually, the next weekend came, but our father spent it organizing his tools properly. My sister and I spent the whole Saturday and Sunday waiting in the garden. The weekend after, no hut either. He had to buy a new lawn mower. He came back with a big smile and a huge technological lawn mower. While he was in the shop, I had built a little prototype of the hut and made some technical drawings. I showed them to him and he said we would make it the following week.

Three years later, my sister and I finally built the big but we dreamt of for so long. But he never came to look at it.

A third father

When I was 10 or so, my father had to work a lot and travelled accordingly. He was in Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt and most of the time he was flying there. He was away many days in a row. I can't remember if it was hard for me, but sure it must have been hard for my mother.

I connect this time with postcards. When my dad was somewhere he always sent me postcards. As he didn't have much time in each place, they mostly were postcards from Lufthansa or other companies. I had a father who sent me postcards from airline companies. I had a whole collection of them.

Sometimes when he was coming back, he was bringing us presents, the advertisement type: gummy-bears in shape of tubes, pens. I had a big collection of those too.

After this period, he wasn't travelling so much any more. He was staying in Berlin all week to set up a new company and was coming back home at week-ends. We thought of moving in Berlin but he left the company.