

War Never Really End

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Wars don't really end, they simply appear throughout the course of our lives in different forms. In Wikipedia it says the Yom Kippur War ended on October 24, 1973. That may be true diplomatically, or even from a historical perspective, but the truth is that war is a constant present. It enters our lives whenever it pleases, and sometimes it simply loiters about in the middle, reminding us of its existence without so much as a rocket alarm or bursting into the evening news.

My war began when I was one year and two months old. It grabbed hold of my mother, my brother and me and joined our family - and replaced our father. He was gone and it stayed, because that is the nature of wars - to stay.

It stayed when I went to kindergarten and told everyone I didn't have a father because he died in the war, and I felt high and mighty, at least as much as the cute ginger kid who was the tallest in our class, even though he had a dad.

It stayed when I rode with my brother to the memorial on top of Mount Herzl in a cab all the way to the Kibbutz's interseccion, where our grandfather picked us up and we drove up with the whole family in a minibus and had delicious apples and rugelach my grandmother brought.

It stayed when I realized that what most of my friends had, a father, I didn't. And even though he's handsome and heroic and beautiful and the state thinks its replacing him by carrying me on its shoulders during summer camps, payments and a lifetime of therapy, the reality is I can't call my dad to protect me when someone hurts me, or just sit down with him for a talk. I can't even fight with my dad, so instead I fight with the war, consult it and sometimes even make peace with it.

The war stayed when we called our children after my father. It stays when I have friends who are 72-years-old (his friends...) who send me WhatsApp messages about my Facebook posts, sometimes to tell me off.

I thought of it one day when my spouse used my phone and searched through my contacts for "Dad". "You don't have 'Dad' on your phone?" she said. I told her I don't have a "Dad" in life either, and we laughed - because wars, for those who've known them for years, can be hilarious.

Let's talk about the damage, not just the memory

My sense of humor is of the war - I can tell people I'm going to visit my father and when they ask where he lives, I say Mount Herzl. When the doctor at the genetic testing exam asked me what my father died from, and told him he was allergic to Egyptians (he did not find it funny).

War is present in our choices, our employment and our fears, it is present when I send my children to military service proud and terrified and angry at this country for leaving me this war on the ironing board, the same one the state of the Jews was granted on in army fatigues.

Wars don't end when Wikipedia says they do, nor when the statesmen and generals decide on a cease-fire. They never do! They seep into our lives in strange ways and fester for generations or brothers and their children. They tower at the center like an insolent monument, constantly reminding us of their being with undulating volume.

That is what I'd like us to think about this Memorial Day - not the ethos or the pathos, nor the national pride or the sorrow and loss or pretty soldiers in black frames under stone pillows - but of life in the shadow of war.

I want us to linger on the damage and not the memory, on the confounding discipline of celebrating Memorial Day and what follows the moment that the flag returns to full mast - what kind of a society is growing here, what sort of children and mothers go about the streets as they carry war inside them - what is the depth of a life inside constant conflict?

This is not a call for light and love, nor is it a cry disconnected from our reality - this is a call for a different perspective on the place we let war occupy and the place which it claims, on life with ever-present engagement, like an endless past that lives in the present and probably our future too.

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