

WithDad

Stephen DiRado

To you Dad. Love you.
You will always be my mentor.

– Stephen

All my life I have been photographing family and friends. It is a ritual accepted without prejudice by all, and my way to empathetically connect. With my father, Gene, succumbing to Alzheimer's, the act of photographing became my way to cope with an intolerable situation. The resulting photographs lay witness for me to comprehend the unbearable deterioration of his mind and body.

I am the oldest of three children, followed by my sister Gina, ending with my brother Chris who is five years younger. We grew up in the 1960s and early 70s, in a middle class suburb of Boston.

For decades, my father **commuted to his job as a successful graphic artist** for the Department of Public Works of the state of Massachusetts; off to work at 7:30am, home by 5:30pm. My mother, Rose, prepared and served dinner faithfully at six o'clock, a rotation of twenty or so favorite, (and not so favorite) meals. The talk around the table was always based around our day's events. Evenings, at some point after dinner,



Gene went to his studio to work on personal projects and the occasional freelance job. Weekends brought about day trips to touristy destinations and visits to large and small art museums. Uncles, aunts and cousins from both sides of our family figured in on some part of our ventures, including summer vacations at the ocean front beaches or mountains of New England. This was a happy time for me.

Our family naturally evolved with time. All three siblings went off to college and



began our own independent lives. After thirty-seven years, **Gene retired with plans to tend the house he designed and built** and to pursue his love of painting.

Rose found solace spending more time with friends and family in Florida, residing in a guarded community, going out for early bird specials, playing cards, mahjong, bingo, and enjoying local variety shows. Only during the coldest months of the year did Gene fly down to visit. For many years this arrangement worked out well for both, until Gene decided it was too much trouble for him to travel.



Gene, who was now in his 60s, found absolute comfort in his home and manicured yard filled with shrubs and perennials. During Rose's absence, he provided for himself, walking his dog Missie three times a day, content with cooking the same few meals: pasta covered in something, and cold cuts for lunch. Gene never went out to eat unless I, or my sister, treated him to his favorite restaurant. We frequently checked in on him, following up with phone calls to each other to

make sure he was *really* ok. My brother joined in on this rotation by moving back home following a decade of living in California. Eventually, **we all noticed that something was definitely wrong** with Gene. Increasingly we found notes by the phone and kitchen table, simple reminders to himself to perform the most mundane tasks. He abandoned his studio, choosing to sit in front of the television all hours of the day, half watching, with no real interest in whatever was on. Gene lost any desire to travel or go out to dinner—anything that would take him away from the house. We became alarmed thinking it must be the effects of depression. It wasn't until he had no explanation as to why it took him hours to drive the twenty minutes to my sister's house or why he could no longer make change from a twenty dollar bill that we entered into a state of crisis.

