

Essay By Gemma Flammand

I remember a very long time ago, school would be over, and I would come home from a long day of elementary school. My dad would be home, and if he wasn't sleeping or working on one of his many hobbies, he and I would go for a walk.

My dad loved bird watching. There was something about birds that intrigued him; maybe it was their ways of communicating, maybe it was something else. My sisters and I would walk through nature trails for hours, complaining or goofing off. My dad would tell us to be quiet as possible, or else we would scare off the birds. Now it just seemed liked he wanted silence. He would have brought a tripod or binoculars, of course, and birdseed. I can't remember anything more perfect than feeding birds, especially the one that sat right on my hand.

When dad asked we wanted to go on a "birdwalk", it was more of a fact than suggestion. We would sigh and groan while we got on our shoes, no doubt dad could hear our complaints, but he knew. He knew the moment we stepped out of the suburban we would keep an eye out for the Red Winged black birds and the Kingfishers while he pointed out the Juncos and American Goldfinches. I remember the Backyard Birdstore, a bird watcher's paradise. Dad would visit with his friend, the owner, for hours while we sat and looked at bird books. The pictures are still vivid in my mind; Golden Eagles and Blue Herrings most of all.

I didn't understand when dad had stopped going on his birdwalks. The shop was becoming busier, I assumed, and workers would come and go. Soon, he was only home at night like mom. At first, my only thought was "thank god!". It meant no more early weekends, sore feet, and extremely hot or cold days. It wasn't until I was cleaning my kitchen one day, gazing outside at the birdfeeders that I realized how much I loved it. The birds were so fun to watch, the way they hop and fight with other birds; even their annoying songs began to make me feel nostalgic. I knew that dad and mom were very busy people now, running a successful yet small business in two cities while trying to get us through school just mean bird walks couldn't happen anymore. I then understood.

My father gave me a precious gift. One of silent approval and understanding as well as knowledge on a world so fascinating. It also was a gift of time we could spend together, one I didn't think was so fleeting, no matter how small it was.

On a very rare occasion, we will go for a walk at one of the old parks. No binoculars or birdseed, usually all we talk about is my future or the shop. Then, he will stop.

"Did you hear that? Juncos, I think."

We will stop to listen to the birds. And that's when I smile the most.