

## **Something About Jeff**

### **Memories of Jeff Miller from His Big Brother**

Russell Miller, Rev 7/21/19

Jeff and I grew up in the Bronx, NY. When I take my kids back there now, I feel tempted to apologize for the neighborhood it has become. But, back in the '50's, it was a comfortable middle class sanctuary, lots of Jewish folks with a diverse mix of immigrants from Europe and Puerto Rico. Our dad worked as a linotype operator for the New York Times. I was three years older than Jeff. When not in school, life in the Bronx was all about playing stickball and hanging out on the front steps of our apartment house. In the mid-fifties, we spent the summers at a lake community north of NYC. Then our parents sent us to day camp in the late-fifties. Those were great times! Back then, Jeff and I were as close as any brothers could be. But the Bronx was becoming a difficult place to live.

Looking back, I'm confident that those summers allowed us to escape the Bronx, which was becoming a ghetto. In 1960, when Jeff was ten and I was thirteen, our family moved to Long Island. If I had 30 friends in those early days, maybe three or four went on to college. So many others fell victim to the decay of our old neighborhood. We would go back to the Bronx to visit in the mid sixties and be amazed how friends like us, exactly like us, were in jail, on probation or just heading down a road to nowhere.

Our mom worked in the Plainview, Long Island high school. Now we were not only living in a more progressive environment but we were tight with the high school guidance department and many of the teachers as an extension of my mom's vocation. Jeff was smart; he skipped a grade in elementary school and scored very high on his SATs. Now, heading to college became a given.

Only now, as I look back, can I clearly connect the dots of our formative lives.

In the mid-sixties, I was in high school and Jeff was in middle school. By 1964, I was off to college, Michigan State, while Jeff attended high school. This geographical reality prevented that daily relationship. But Jeff still looked at me as his role model, at least that's what he told me.

In 1966, Jeff came out to Michigan and stayed at my fraternity house for a week. Back then, he was fondly labeled by my fraternity brothers as Junior Jew. Vietnam was a world away and not yet relevant to either of our lives. Jeff loved the life I was living and aspired to follow in my footsteps. Consequently, he applied to MSU, was accepted and entered the Freshman Class in the Fall of '67. He even joined my fraternity.

We both attended MSU until I graduated in December '68. But even before that, things became complicated. Our three-year difference in age became more significant. The war was heating up and Jeff had become extremely passionate in his views about it. At the same time, I was thinking about starting a career. Jeff and I loved each other dearly but he would jokingly accuse me of being a capitalist. I didn't see that as necessarily a bad thing.

Regarding the war, Jeff threatened to move to Canada while I naively believed most of what our government was preaching. I would go if drafted.

As I look back, 1969 was pivotal. Michigan State and our fraternity stood for everything Jeff now rejected. He had friends at Kent State, friends from Plainview, and he would drive down to visit them regularly. By January, 1970, he transferred to Kent.

By the Spring of 1970, we had migrated to opposite ends of the Vietnam spectrum. I lobbied that moving to Canada could potentially destroy his life. He saw no other option. I was still insulated from the war due to my employment in the medical device industry.

Would he have actually headed north? I'll never know.

The last time I saw him was Easter, 1970. We double dated in Manhattan. That was a nice evening.

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