

Et Nunc Manet In Nos

A (Modern) Love Story,
1942-1945
(true to the letter)

An Epistolary Novel

*The words of Aaron Kelman,
as told through his son*

Gary Kelman

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PREFACE AND PROCESS

In January 2016 my 93-year old mother died peacefully in her sleep. Having suffered from increasing dementia for the previous 5 years, and living (existing) in a near-vegetative state, her passing was not a surprise. But what *was* a surprise was the cache of treasure she left behind. While going through the obligatory, difficult, somewhat cathartic practice of cleaning out her apartment, I came across several old worn carry-on travel bags (advertising “Pan Am” and “Eastern” airlines), stashed away in the back of a closet, buried beneath a lifetime of forgotten items (clothes from a bygone era, outdated appliances, boxes of loose photographs that had never made it into an album, tarnished candlesticks and miscellaneous *tchotchkes*). Not wanting to risk discarding anything worth keeping, I quickly opened the zippers and suddenly, shockingly, found myself stepping through the looking glass into a bygone era. I did not exactly discover the Dead Sea Scrolls or a lost original of the Declaration of Independence, but assuredly something even more personal and valuable to me.

Neatly tied up with string were a series of bundles of letters dating to my own “prehistoric” time, when my parents were courting while living apart from 1942-1945. Though they had known each other from early adolescence, their romantic relationship was still in its infancy then, just beginning to root and sprout buds, and that time period embodied the growth and development of a love affair that lasted their entire lifetime, and of which I was one of the products (along with my older brother and younger sister). God only knows when those love letters had last been read, or whether my mother had known they even still existed. But exist they did, in nearly pristine condition, still in their original envelopes, with 3 cent postage stamps, bearing postmarks from Boston (where my father was living), emblazoned with the WW II slogans of “Support Our Boys, Buy US Savings Bonds.” The paper was somewhat yellowed and

fragile to be sure, but the writing remained clear and unmistakably my Dad's chickenscratch (he was penmanship-challenged to say the least). The letters were arranged neatly in chronological order, and (lovingly) tied with twine likely manufactured in factories and sold in stores bustling with the war effort then ongoing. They *were* the Dead Sea Scrolls to me, chronicling recorded history of years and occurrences that I knew little to nothing about, and detailing the experiences, hopes, dreams, plans, passions, etc of the man I would one day call "Dad". Suddenly I had a window with a direct view from street level into the development of a relationship/ soon-to-be-marriage in gestation.

Search in that apartment as I might, I failed to find the corresponding letters from my mother to my Dad, only those from him to her. Yet they were enough, and told the tale of love, trust, and commitment that never wavered, which, through the lens of hindsight, seems likely the winning combination for a successful and lasting union of man and woman.

Writing this book was a personal, perhaps somewhat self-indulgent, labor of love to learn about my past, my history, the DNA that is me. I subscribe to the philosophy that *everything* (not just looks and brains but personality, likes and dislikes, opinions and choices, etc) is genetic, and once sperm meets egg our entire future (personal) evolution is determined. I can often hear my own voice through my Dad's words, things that I still say, expressions I still use, reactions I still have. This book was borne of a love and admiration for my Dad as well as my own natural human interest and curiosity to know who I am and where I came from. Our present-day near obsession with uncovering our background and heritage (through [ancestry.com](#), [23&me](#), etc) is a feeble attempt and pales in comparison with meeting our parents and ancestors *before* they were our parents, like Marty McFly in [Back to the Future](#) (how amazing would that be!).

The process of telling this story was quite simple: I allowed my Dad's words to wash over and envelop me as I transcribed them verbatim. I followed one rule and one rule only: be true to my Dad,

even if confusing and incorrect in the rush and informality of letter-writing. Despite the spelling and grammatical errors inherent in the spontaneous flow of words on paper (as in letters, as opposed to more polished writings such as essays or books), I chose to memorialize my Dad's words exactly as he wrote them, feeling that his stream-of-consciousness was the truest most accurate reflection of his thoughts and feelings at the time (which is really what this book is all about). Rather than use spell-check or interpret the letters with my own spin, I wanted the book to be about my Dad and Mom, not about me, and his very words, available as they are, seemed to be the surest road to that end. A few letters were typewritten (with multiple errors of their own consistent with the manual typewriters of the day); but most were in long-hand, often difficult to "translate into modern English" because of the rushed and somewhat sloppy handwriting of a busy twenty-something writing with a fountain pen, often smudged and nearly hieroglyphic in their appearance. I assume that over time my mother "figured it out", as I did. Unfortunately, as time went by, the writing became even worse and nearly indecipherable (part of *his* process of becoming a doctor). But I did my very best, even if "my very best" meant guessing at my Dad's words and intentions. But mostly I think I really got it (mostly) right.

THE SETTING

My Dad's best friend growing up was Solly Berson, a local kid who lived in the neighborhood and was a classmate in elementary, high school, and college. The Jewish community of the day lived together and studied together, not exactly removed from their surroundings but definitely inbred. Being a frequent visitor at the Berson home, my Dad met Solly's sister, Gloria, and the rest is history. They started dating and fell in love.

After graduating from City College, and with an interest in Science, my Dad initially hoped to be a Biology teacher; but that career never really got off the ground. So he decided to shoot for the stars, go for

the gold, and become a doctor. While awaiting acceptance to medical school, he worked in the research department of the American Museum of Natural History, while Gloria attended Hunter College with a degree in Social Work. Year after year no medical school offer was made, but he kept trying. Finally he was invited to attend Middlesex College of Medicine, in Waltham, Massachusetts, and, with no other place to go, and with Gloria still living at home with her parents in Brooklyn (the custom of the day for young unmarried women), he reluctantly accepted this assignment, and moved the 220 miles north in early 1942.

So much for the backstory. Now come, enter into my imagination, memory banks, and time machine; travel back 70+ years and see things as they really were for two young people in love during the sentinel period of their lives, during one of the most critical periods of humanity, when the world was at war and annihilation of the human race was a real consideration and possibility...and my future was in the balance...