

## March 1988

### The beginning of the end

From "Faith and Fear – A Memoir" by Jesse Friedman

March brought the end, and the beginning of the end.

By March there was an ever-dwindling optimism amongst the attorneys, my mother, and my life. It was obvious my father was going to be incarcerated after his sentencing in federal court. My father was terrified of returning to jail, and to solitary confinement. He truly believed he was going to die, "that my body is just going to give out" at any moment.

My father's "panic attacks" grew in frequency and intensity as the impending sentencing date before judge Costantino grew neigh. Dad would suddenly begin shrieking, and wailing, and gasping for air, crying and flailing his arms as if to ward off a hoard of on-coming attackers.

From David's Diary:

*Dad had one of his seizures and it was horrible. He was screaming. His eyes bulged. His tongue was out. His hands were flailing. His feet stomping. I grabbed him and held him. Brought him to the floor to sooth him.*

*He is so scared of going back to federal jail. I'm trying to make jail seem good. What a lie. But I am helping him.*

The story of what happened during 1988 is the most difficult portion of my story to tell. The events of March 1988 are the most difficult portion of the most difficult chapter.

It was March 19, 1988. I was trying to explain to my stupefied father how evil my mother was behaving. Perhaps others would find "evil" too harsh, but she certainly was putting her own selfish whims ahead of any genuine, self-sacrificing concern for my best welfare.

"Dad, she doesn't know what's going on. She doesn't listen. She doesn't..."

"She's going her best," he said, which just served to upset me.

"Her best! Her best? Her best is not gonna save my life."

Repeating himself, he said, "She's trying her best."

"Why can't you stand up and say what you know is the truth!"

My father tried to be reassuring, "You can't rely upon her to save your life. You're going to save your own life in spite of her." As if such pearls of wisdom could help me.

"You don't understand. I can't do anything if she's the one paying my lawyer! My lawyer calls her, and finds out what to do about the case from her, and doesn't relay information to me."

"Well, Jerry knows better than that," my father assured me.

"Well, he *better* hear that from your mouth, that he is to call me, and not to call Elaine.

"I already told him."

And then my mother interrupted. "These demands are like gauntlets being thrown down."

"No Ma," I replied, condescendingly. "No more euphemisms. No analogies. After Daddy is incarcerated it becomes my case, and Jerry will contact me directly."

My mother said she wanted to talk to my father in private for a moment.

Then turning to my father, as if Seth and I were no longer in the room, said, "Isn't Jesse... I don't want to use the word, still a child?"

My father answered, "But he's saying he will include you in decisions."

Still ignoring that I was sitting right there she said, "Then why is Jesse saying anything at all?"

And so I screamed out, frustrated, "Because I want Jerry to call me!"

"You can't demand that people do things," was my mother response. And then, sarcastically she mimicked someone else talking, "Jesse is being Jesse. He's saying, *'I'm the boss around here and what I say goes.'*"

"No, I did not say that."

And then Seth spoke up agreeing, "Jesse never said that."

"I said," clarifying, "that I want Jerry to call me and tell me what's going on with the case."

Addressing my father, my mother asked, "Do you think Jesse has a right to demand this?"

Seth, trying to be rational, asked, "What's going on? Why do you keep using the word 'demand'? Jesse is trying to save his life. Isn't he entitled to save his life?"

My father said, "I think Jesse is entitled to have first-hand information from Jerry."

To which my mother stubbornly said, "I object to Jesse..."

And my father interrupted surprised, "Being contacted directly by his lawyer?"

"Absolutely not," my mother said emphatically. "I object to Jesse..." and with a sigh, continuing, "When Jesse was in second grade the principle said to Jesse, 'Come here.' And Jesse said, 'I will not.' Now in this world when authority says, 'Do it!' people who are not in authority must do what authority says. I think this is a given. Well, in this family, in all families, the mothers and the fathers are the authority, and the children are not the authority."

"I AM NOT A CHILD!" I screamed. "MY LIFE IS AT STAKE!"

My father told me calmly to listen to what my mother was saying.

"I don't think that Jesse has the right to demand that he be in charge of his life," was what my mother seemed to believe.

Seth was flabbergasted. "How can you say such a thing! He has graduated from childhood to adulthood."

I continued to try and reach a family consensus that once my father was incarcerated again, that the attorney reach out to me with information and for decisions about the case, and not to my mother as some sort of regent.

But to no avail. My father would not take a stand, and neither of my parents thought to put my best interest first.

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Later that same day my mother and Seth were talking:

"You have to understand the ramifications and the issues," my mother said to Seth. "If you steal a record from a record store..."

"I don't wanna hear that analogy again," Seth said, interrupting.

Continuing without missing a beat, "... and you walk out with the record..."

"I don't wanna hear that analogy again!" Seth screamed.

My mother paused, and then continued, "You took the record..." which infuriated Seth.

"I don't wanna hear that analogy again!" and Seth stormed out of the room.

There was some commotion in the kitchen, and then my mother came back, now visibly upset.

"I don't care anymore!" she said, crying. "You don't care about me! I don't care about you! If you think you can keep Jesse out of jail, do it! I'm trying to keep Jesse out of jail the best way I know how!"

"Well, you're not doing a very good job," Seth pointed out calmly.

“Well I’m sorry!” still upset and crying, my mother said. “Then I resign! That’s what you want!”

At this point my father interjected trying to calm everyone down. “Why? Explain one thing. Why is it you think Jerry will keep you out of jail, and Krieger won’t?”

Before I had a chance to answer my father’s question my mother let out a shriek.

“I DON’T GIVE A SHIT!”

My only response at the time to such an outburst was to turn to Seth and flatly observe, “See, she doesn’t give a shit. She wants to have her way.”

“Now wait a minute,” my father said, being concerned. “We’re trying to ascertain something very important here. I’m trying to figure out what’s going on.”

My mother, still upset, and not quite following the conversation at hand begins again. “In a family there is a mother and a father, and mothers are not persecuted! They’re listened to and respected!” And turning to my father said, “They have to respect me and trust me!”

To which my father explained, “The family already decided. If there was going to be one attorney for Jesse that it was going to be Jerry Bernstein.”

“No!” demanded my mother. “We’ll discuss it at the time.”

“It’s already been discussed,” my father pointed out. “And you agreed to it. You said that it would be okay. That you were okay with that.”

“Absolutely not!” insisted my mother. “It will be discussed at the time.”

At this point Seth chimed in as the lone voice of reason, “At that time might not be a good time to discuss it because Daddy might not be around to be part of the decision making process.”