

## **Statement by Arnie Alpert**

May 17, 2018

On what would have been the first day of sixth grade after Christmas break, my father woke me up early to tell me my grandfather had been murdered.

Going into his hardware store late at night, my grandfather had surprised a burglar who had entered through a skylight. The burglar grabbed a hammer, hit my grandfather in the head, and Charlie Alpert was dead.

I was 11 years old. The next few days were a bit of a blur, as the serious affairs of grownups often are to children. Looking back five decades later, though, I understand that the way my family dealt with the tragedy had a profound effect on me.

Charlie Alpert was a well-known man about town. An immigrant from eastern Europe, he came early in the century to Springfield, Mass., fought in World War I, married my grandmother, opened Alpert Brothers Hardware and raised three children. He spoke Polish and Yiddish in addition to English and was active in civic groups, including the Masons and Jewish War Veterans. Among my clearest memories of early childhood are Sunday morning trips to the park to feed the ducks with him and my older sister.

Grandpa's death was a shock, of course. My memory centers on my grandmother's grief and on the dozens of people who passed through her kitchen and living room over the course of a week. There were aunts and uncles, obscure cousins whose relationship to my grandparents I never figured out, and family friends. Even the mayor of Springfield stopped by, which made me think my grandfather must have been an important person.

Everyone's attention was on my grandmother. I do not remember any discussion of the killer.

Grownups shield children from as much adult violence as they can, and no doubt there was a lot that I missed. But children can also be remarkably perceptive, and I suspect my memory reflects my family's attitudes at the time.

My memory of the trial is mostly of how difficult it was for my grandmother, who had to appear as a witness. I don't remember much talk about the murderer and only recall a great sense of relief when the trial was over and the accused killer was convicted and sent to prison.

My family's response to an act of brutal violence does not explain why I turned out to be a supporter of nonviolence and an opponent of the death penalty, but it's easy to see how my path in life might have been different.

Looking back, I think my family knew what was most important. They devoted their attention to my grandmother, and to each other, not to my grandfather's killer.

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