

I absolutely adored Spock. Loving Dad was much more complicated.

A son of Boston, Leonard Nimoy was also my father.

By Adam Nimoy *The Boston Globe*, June 17, 2021.



The author and his father, Leonard Nimoy, in 1967. Adam Nimoy

“On your left is the site of the Boston Massacre, where British troops shot and killed several people while being harassed by an angry crowd of protestors. Just around the corner on the right . . .”

We sat in the back. Dad was incognito, wearing a baseball cap and sunglasses. No one knew that Spock was sitting at the rear of the bus. This was in 2013, when Dad and I were in Boston filming a documentary about his

life growing up in the old West End. During a break in filming, we made like tourists and climbed aboard one of those ridiculous-looking World War II amphibious landing vehicles. I have to admit: It was fun. Splashing into the Charles River for a little boat ride and then driving back onto dry land is something you don't experience in Los Angeles.

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"We are now passing Beacon Hill, home to John F. Kennedy, John Hancock, and John Kerry, the three Johns. And we're coming up on the West End, formerly an immigrant neighborhood that was demolished in the 1950s to make way for quote-unquote urban renewal. Of course, the most famous resident of the original West End is none other than Leonard Nimoy, who starred as Mr. Spock on 'Star Trek.' Do we have any 'Star Trek' fans on board?"

About a half dozen people raised their hands. Some yelled their excitement. I got all warm and fuzzy inside. Dad sat with his arms crossed over his linen jacket and gave one of his approving nods. Paul Revere, John Adams, John Kennedy, and . . . Leonard Nimoy. What a lineup — "highly illogical," as Mr. Spock would say.

The trip to Boston gave me the chance to see the city through my father's eyes while giving Dad an opportunity to relive the events that shaped his life and career. Father and son closeness was relatively new to us.



On the bridge of the Starship Enterprise in July 1966, six weeks before Star Trek's television debut. Adam Nimoy

When I was a kid growing up, I remember Dad hustling to support our family with numerous odd jobs, all while he pursued his acting career. He did this even after "Star Trek" became a hit. Dad often took me into the recording studio where he sang covers for several albums — the most legendary of these was "[Leonard Nimoy Presents Mr. Spock's Music From Outer Space.](#)" Our family sometimes flew around the country with him on weekends when he made personal appearances in front of hundreds of fans. He made books of [photography](#) and [poetry](#), and he performed in plays when "Trek" was not in production. Gore Vidal's "A Visit to a Small Planet," performed at a dinner theater outside Chicago, was one of my favorites.

There was simply no stopping this kid whose work ethic was forged on the Depression-era streets of Boston. Generating income to survive became an obsession of the Nimoy family. As part of our documentary, Dad and I walked around town while he recounted the part-time jobs he held in

the early days. It wasn't too hard to imagine a young Leonard folding chairs at the Hatch bandshell after a performance of the Boston Pops or selling vacuum cleaners out of a storefront on Boylston Street. While we were walking up Beacon Hill, he told me that when he was 10 years old, he slipped in the snow and the newspapers he was supposed to deliver went sliding down the sidewalk in all directions.

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I picked myself up, collected my newspapers, and continued on my way."

"Sounds sort of like a metaphor for your life," I said.

"What do you mean sort of?"

My lack of anything close to Dad's obsessive drive made him a little crazy. I was 10 when "Star Trek" debuted in 1966, and I was reading Spider-Man comics and listening to the Beatles at home in LA — a very different experience from having to deliver newspapers in the dead of a Boston winter.

Dad's zeal for work had its downside. His career always came first. He was not one to come to Little League games, for example — a regular source of disappointment for a boy who just wanted to please the father he so admired.

For many years, we loved each other at a distance, unable to bridge the divide that began with our very different childhood experiences. I absolutely adored Spock; loving Dad was much more complicated. He was not present when I needed him, and when he was around, it was awkward. The dysfunction in our relationship became all the more apparent as I raised my own kids, taking the time to stay connected and to share so much with them. Sometimes, I felt like I had lost my father to all those adoring fans who could easily love him from afar.

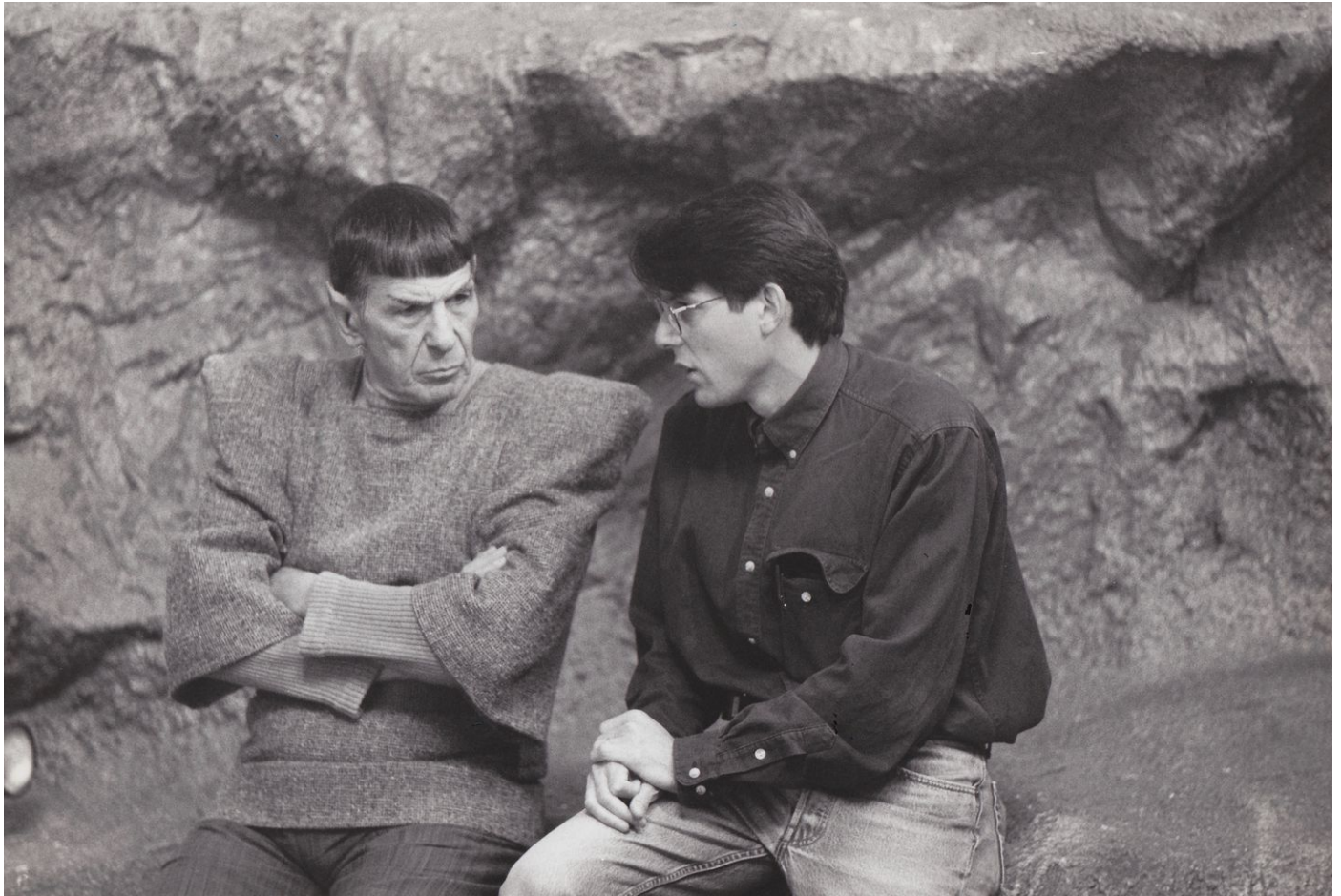


The author assists his father's transformation into Spock with "Star Trek" makeup artist Fred Phillips in 1966. Adam Nimoy

I wanted to be the good son by showing up for all the celebrations of Dad's many successes, even if he didn't always reciprocate. But there came a point when there was so much distance that we were essentially estranged for a number of years. Dad's solution to this stalemate was to send me a four-page accounting of all of my shortcomings. I was devastated, perhaps even more so because much of what he had written was true. I was tempted to counter with an accounting of his own faults that was twice as long. I didn't do that. Instead, with the help of 12-step recovery and a very persuasive sponsor, I made an amends to my dad for everything in his letter. And from that day forward, everything changed.

Our reconnection was so strong that three years later, when my second wife, Martha, was diagnosed with cancer, Dad became my go-to guy, helping me through one of the most difficult periods of my life. It wasn't just that he showed up with enchiladas or a roast chicken. It was that he showed up for me. He was always available, always there to listen. Martha's chemo and radiation were a grueling 18 months of treatment. When the doctors told me

she wasn't going to make it, the first person I called was my father. Relying on him like that would have been unthinkable just a few short years before.



Father and son, right, on the set of "Star Trek: The Next Generation" in 1991. Adam Nimoy

'You can take the boy out of Boston'

Dad's been gone for six years now. He might have turned 90 this year had COPD — the consequence of his 30-year addiction to cigarettes — not taken him in 2015. This past March, in honor of Dad's March 26th birthday, then-Boston mayor Marty Walsh declared the date "Leonard Nimoy Day."

Reflecting the sentiments of many Spock fans, Walsh's proclamation read, in part, "Through his fictional character, Mr. Spock — half human/half Vulcan — gave the immigrant, the refugee, and the oppressed a hero for the Outsider."

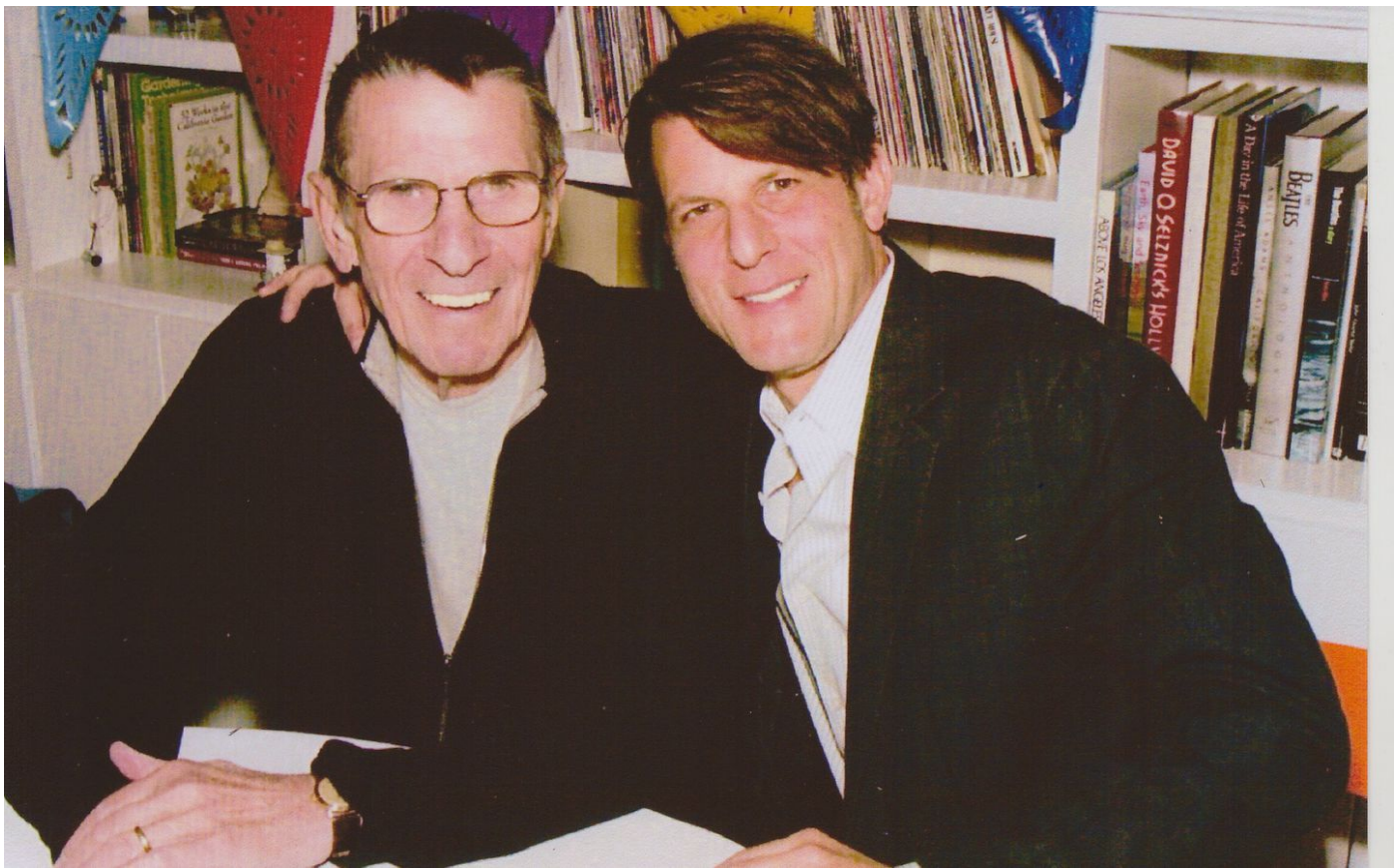
The same week, Boston's Museum of Science announced that it was developing a 20-foot stainless steel hand depicting the "Live Long and

Prosper" Vulcan salute created by my father. Like him, it had its origins in the West End.

Dad was the son of Russian-speaking immigrants from Ukraine. His memories of attending the Jewish High Holy Days in a West End synagogue included seeing the temple's leaders bestow the Priestly Blessing on the congregation using the now-familiar hand gesture. Few people know that it represents the Hebrew letter *Shin*, which means *Shaddai*, one of the many names for God. The salute has since become an international symbol of goodwill. It even has its own emoji.

Dad often said that growing up in an insular neighborhood of Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants made him feel like an outsider in greater Boston and gave him the experience he needed to build an inner life for Mr. Spock. Just before he died, he reminded me that Spock, half Vulcan, was the only alien on the bridge of the Enterprise. Spock always wanted to integrate himself among his crewmates, Dad said, "to give the best that he had to offer."

I feel the same way about how my father lived his own life.



Leonard Nimoy and the author, right, enjoying a newfound closeness. Julie Nimoy

“You can take the boy out of Boston, but you can’t take Boston out of the boy,” my uncle Mel, Dad’s now-94-year-old brother, once told me.

Before leaving Boston for Los Angeles at the age of 18 in 1949, Dad coached basketball at West End House, which was dedicated to keeping the children of immigrants off the streets while helping them assimilate into American society. He discovered his love of acting at the Elizabeth Peabody Playhouse. Father John Bon at Boston College gave him a scholarship to attend a summer drama class.

As we toured the city of his birth, Dad told me that growing up in Boston was such a rich and meaningful experience that he often liked to live in the past. This was an interesting thing to say for someone who very much lived in the moment, never resting on his achievements, always exploring ways to express himself artistically. He was also interested in passing the baton to the next generation (if you will) by inspiring young artists to find their courage and their voices.

"You are the creators and the curators of your own lives," Dad told the Boston University School of Communication graduates in 2012. "Give us the best of your art. We crave it. We hunger for it. Help us to see ourselves, to know ourselves, to illuminate our lives. And keep in mind what Victor Hugo said: Popularity is the crumbs of greatness."

Even with the stellar rise of Mr. Spock, there was never anything flashy-Hollywood about Dad. The fame and the fortune, the red carpets and the limousines, were all very fine. I know he enjoyed the trappings of his well-earned success. All of us in the Nimoy family did. But in the end, Dad always knew exactly where he came from.

Adam Nimoy lives in Los Angeles, where he teaches filmmaking at Beit T'Shuvah, a residential addiction treatment center.