Antioch, Berkeley, and Columbia were the ABC's of colleges my father said he wouldn't pay for — breeding grounds for radicalism he called them, as if their campuses were giant Petri dishes spawning toxic cultures. Our own pathology was pretty toxic at the time, both of us stubbornly refusing to learn anything about each other, or about ourselves for that matter, stuck in a rudimentary pattern of defining ourselves as opposites. I wouldn't even look at Kenyon, his beloved alma mater, despite its long tradition as a school for future poets. I hadn't read a word of Robert Lowell or James Wright yet, but I'd read Ginsberg, and the first stop on my college tour was Columbia, and that's where I ended up going. And my father, to his credit, must have seen it was the right place for me or at least was unavoidable, so he let me go, and he paid for it. And the only price I had to pay was, when I was home on holidays, to suffer his barbed commentary about the very education he
was financing, which ironically had to do with the core values of Western Civilization. I can’t remember – is forgiveness one of them? We both got a C in Forgiveness but later bumped it up to a B minus when, in a surprising twist, my son ended up at Kenyon. My father took real pleasure in that, though he was already dying by then. I thought of him at graduation, how proud he would have been for his grandson who, he might have joked, was a better student than he had ever been – all our ignorance put aside at least for that one day of celebration.