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Tradition you can count on, yesterday, today and tomorrow.  
Happy Passover!
A New Venture

RACHEL PIUTI

It was September 1955, and after four years in Canada, Paul and I were embarking on a new venture, a grocery store. It would be very different from what we had done until now. We knew nothing about the grocery business, but we were young, energetic and optimistic. After all, we didn’t know anything about carpet binding when we began doing that four years ago. Yet we became accomplished carpet-binders. I could finish a nine-by-12-foot rug in half an hour, and it became a lucrative enterprise. But we had to give it up because the store that supplied us with most of the work closed. The few other clients we still had did not give us enough material to continue with the business. So we decided to move on. We sold the house on Brock Avenue.

We moved not too far away. Our cousin Martin owned a building on Elm Grove Avenue, just south of Queen Street West. It had an empty store, once used as a grocery, with living quarters in the back and a rented five-room apartment on the second floor.

“Why don’t you take the place, live in the back and open a grocery? You can live rent-free until you make a go of the business. People are doing very well in groceries,” Martin suggested.

It’s not a bad idea, Paul and I thought. We had a nine-month-old baby boy and an older boy. A store with rooms behind it would allow me to stay at home and look after the two children, as well as help out in the store. We had visions of working the business up; sure, we would start small, but there was no reason we couldn’t develop it and become, if not like the Westons of Loblaws and the A&P, or the Blacks of Dominion, then maybe like the Goodwills or the Kidekels. After all, our friends Isaac and Rela, who had come to Canada only two years ago, had a thriving grocery store on Dundas Street near Bathurst.

So we hired a carpenter to make new shelves. A handyman put new linoleum tiles on the floor. There was already a refrigerator and a service counter, and we bought a used adding machine. We also fixed up the back apartment, a bedroom and a very large kitchen with a tiny room and bath behind. Not too bad, we thought.

Our friend Isaac advised us about wholesalers, bakeries and dairies. Finally, the day came when we opened the store. We sent out fliers in the neighbourhood: “PAUL’S GROCERY NOW OPEN”, printed in bold black letters.

The shelves were neatly stocked with all kinds of cans, jars of coffee, tea and jams. At seven in the morning the baker’s truck arrived to deliver bread and doughnuts, the dairyman brought a case of milk, butter, cheese and eggs. Schneider’s meat packer, the best, we were told, brought some meats. Another truck delivered fruit and vegetables.

They had to be paid, papers had to be signed. We tried to make sure, as we were warned by Isaac, that all was delivered as ordered. It was bedlam.

A moment after everybody left, the newly installed doorbell rang. It was Dorothy, the lady from upstairs. She wore a pink housedress that emphasized her ample figure, pink mules on her bare feet and curlers in her blond hair.

“I will be your first customer, for good luck,” she said. “I would like six chocolate doughnuts and six bottles of Coca-Cola for our breakfast.” She paid 66 cents, 30 cents for doughnuts and 36 cents for the Coke. Continued on next page
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I was surprised. Is this what she feeds her family for breakfast? She continued to do this every morning, as long as we had the store.

I had met her for the first time only a couple of weeks earlier. She knocked on our door and introduced herself. “I am Dorothy. We live upstairs, my husband and I, and our five children. Our youngest is one year old and our oldest, Steven, is 12. Then there is Bonnie, 10, and all the rest of them. My husband is Jewish,” she added, as if to reassure me.

She offered to do a weekly cleaning of my apartment for seven dollars. I told her that I was sorry, but I could not afford it. But we did make an arrangement. Steven and Bonnie would take Kobi, our five year old, to kindergarten every day.

Dorothy made it a habit to come to the store at odd hours for a chat. The doorbell would ring and I would rush in from the back thinking that a customer had come, only to discover that it was Dorothy. She would buy a chocolate bar, eat it leisurely and engage me in conversation. I needed badly to be in the back, there was so much to do. Often, the baby would cry while I was with her in the store.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
Dorothy would say, "Go on, go in to him. I’ll stay in the store."

And I would say: "It’s OK, it’s healthy for babies to cry a bit. It’s good exercise for their lungs." (Where I got this idea, I don’t know.) The truth was that I didn’t want to leave her alone in the store. I had money in the till that I put in every morning to make it look as if there were some sales in case a client came and I had to give change. The sad fact was that hardly any clients came. Only in the evening, when all the other stores were closed, someone would come for a bottle of milk or a loaf of bread. I didn’t know Dorothy well enough to trust her, and what I knew wasn’t very flattering. She was obviously too lazy to prepare a good breakfast for her family.

During our daily chats, I hinted to her that for the price of the cokes and the doughnuts she could feed her children a healthy breakfast of oatmeal, eggs, bread and milk. But she continued in her way. She also went every afternoon to play bingo and left her preschoolers alone upstairs.

When we first opened the store for business, a number of our friends came and made a big shopping. Each one did it once and no more. There were very good reasons for that. First of all it was inconvenient. They had to drive over from wherever they lived, some quite a distance away, instead of shopping in their neighbourhoods. The second and more important reason was that we were expensive. I found this out when a customer complained that I charged too much for a jar of coffee, that the Dominion store on Queen Street, almost across the road from us, sold it for much less.

I went to the Dominion store the next day to check out their prices, and sure enough, everything was much cheaper than in our store. But it wasn’t only less than we charged – it was less than what we paid for the products wholesale. The obvious reason was that we bought one case at a time while Dominion bought cases in the hundreds. What chance did we have? We could not compete with giants. The store was turning out to be a failure. We were losing money on the unsold and spoiling fruits and vegetables as well as the drying, shrinking meats. Paul went back to binding carpets because we needed the money. He worked away from home and this meant that I was alone in the store with the kids. I knew that this could not go on.

About every second evening, a Polish lady came to the store on her way home from work to buy some groceries. We usually had a polite chat in Polish. She was a librarian by profession, but she couldn’t do that here because her English was not good enough. She was an older lady, soft spoken and neatly dressed.

“Like this store,” she said to me one evening. “I would like to own such a store. I could prepare various salads and sell them. It would be convenient for me to live in the back. This is a Polish district and I would do well here. I don’t mean to offend you, but you understand, I could do better here than you. Would you consider selling?”

Would we? Of course we would! The woman bought the building from our cousin Martin. We were extremely happy to throw off the yoke and get back the money we invested in the business. I am sure that the Polish lady did very well there. I never went back to find out.
Redeemed

ISRAEL ELLIS

During a European cruise with friends, we disembark to an idyllic German town called Warnemünde. I would imagine that what Georgian Bay and the Muskokas are to Torontonians, this quaint seaside town is to Berliners. As I walk through the pretty Cape Cod–type oceanfront, I cannot help my anxiety building. Any time I find myself in Germany I see the streets through different lenses. Superimposed images of Nazi–era authority populate the streetscape. I would not be walking these streets in another time.

I once came upon a photograph hanging in the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. A streetcar turning between two main thoroughfares, a Woolworth store prominently in the background, cars, people in business attire, mothers pushing baby carriages – the photographer’s click of the shutter happens while the wholesale murder of Jews is taking place. This could be downtown anywhere anytime.

We disembark at this town, Warnemünde, and we walk along a scenic view sidelining the beach, our shoes shuffling along the wooden slats of a boardwalk that has borne the time of history. We happen upon a small inn and we stop to enjoy a wonderful lunch on its veranda overlooking the summer beach scene. My friend and I are surveying our German lunch companions. It is all just so pleasant. Our wives plead with their eyes not to vocalize what we are thinking. I decide suddenly that I will make a bracha and I do so out loud on the drink I am holding. I say it with a certain conviction. You have not quieted me!

Lunch is actually settling, but the anxiety within me builds. We take a walk through the beautiful picturesque tree–laden streets of the town, and I cannot help but glance over at the doorframes of homes. I am looking for the unmistakable indentation where a mezuzah might have once been. My mind turns back to imagine a darker time when this place was one of the first “cleansed” of its Jews.

I'm such a pleasure to travel through Europe with.

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We stop for a coffee and danish in the most classic of corner bakeries you can imagine, an aroma of cinnamon overcoming your senses and dragging you in. We take a seat outside overlooking the town square. I cannot help myself. I try to engage the two older women sitting at the next table: “Oh, hello,” I say with a smile. I can be pleasant. Let bygones be. My attention lingers for a few seconds too long. “By the way, I have returned!” I cannot help myself. They look at me weirdly, quickly finalize the last proper slurps of their teas and promptly leave. One of my friends, Eli, is holding back. Barely.

We are on the move again. As the girls walk in and out of designer boutique clothiers, I continue down the street and randomly happen upon an antique dealer’s shop, which we enter mindlessly, walking through as you would in such a place, fingerling this and that – not really paying attention – rather a bit bored, I might imagine it, the sudden urgency of the matter at hand is rising in my throat. The clerk is a middle-aged woman who looks as if she got stuck behind the counter, forgotten some time ago, the years just streamed by. We point to the silver object of our interest in the encasement and she casually acknowledges in her crisp German tongue and with a single descriptor she almost shouts: “Juden!” I pause while the breath is quietly knocked out from under me.

In a slightly heightened tone, I say, “Oh, is that so?” The heat rises in my chest. “Well then,” I say through my gritted teeth, “bring us all the Juden out, please!” She does not understand, and I try to motion with my hands and use the little German I know (sorry, is that Yiddish?) to express my eagerness. The sudden urgency of the matter at hand is rising in my throat.

A young scratchy, academic-looking traveler who had entered the store earlier becomes part of the scene now playing out. He explains to the clerk in perfect German, and the cabinet is open. Five pieces appear on the counter in front of us. Once again, she exclaims, “Juden!” I am not sure if I imagined it, the curt directness of her voice – was I hearing, perhaps a feign of some form of surprise as to who could possibly be interested in these derelict objects?

She lays out the objects on the etched glass countertop: a leather-bound siddur in its original case from 1898, something a groom would give to his bride; a beautiful large silver and filigree yad with a sculpted boy supporting a world upon which sits an eagle; a small yad encased in colourful stones; a ring with a house on top that was used at Jewish weddings; and the most striking pair of silver salt and pepper shakers I have ever seen.

I start in on her – “Where did you get these things?” – as my young bystander starts to translate. She is just staring at me, becoming increasingly uneasy by my tone. I ask again, the agitation more obvious. “The Juden,” I stammer, “is this all you have?” She nods her head and picks up the phone. I hear her talking nervously with someone who I assume is the owner of the store. Is she reporting me? Are they coming? She puts down the receiver, an impassive look. I sweep my hand impatiently over the cache of items. “We will take it all” – our young translator seems to understand the intensity of the moment. She looks up at us and for the first time in fair English she announces the most unexpected of questioned statements, “Will you buy them or take them?”

“Did she really just say that?”

“I’m sorry!” I don’t have the energy to ask what she means. I need to get out of there and leave. A price is established. I cannot help but feel that I have just negotiated for something that belongs to me.

I am feeling as if I just found something I lost and I don’t want to lose it again. The girls see us through the window from the street and join us. They immediately see what it is we are so animated about. We pay the pieces with fierce determination. We walk out into the sunlight and in a moment I get the sense that Eli and I just observed and shared a rare mitzvah, the commandment of pidyon shvuyim, redemption of the captive. This is a duty in Judaism to bring about the release of a fellow Jew captured or unjustly held by the authorities. The release is typically secured by a ransom paid by the Jewish community.

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I walk out of that store feeling as if we needed to hurry away. I am feeling protective of our acquisitions. And irrationally fearful. For the remainder of our trip, we lay out the pieces, speak about their significance and imagine the stories these objects were witness too but would never be spoken of.

The salt and pepper shakers that I would return home with now adorn my Shabbat table. There is very little I can tell about the vintage of these two pieces. The pair is most unique and ornate. Three crafted Hasidic musicians support a globe laden with a single jewel on top.

Every Friday night, as our family and friends gather around the table to welcome in the Shabbat, these objects are placed in a position of honour by the challah board. I give a few moments to pay attention to these silver pieces and ask for everyone sitting around the table to imagine who may have first owned these and how they came to end up in some antique store. No matter. I traded and made their way legitimately time. For all I know, these were eagerly time. For all I know, these were eagerly eagerly sought after. So I marvel that some 70 years later, here we are, having redeemed these objects. And in some existential way, the souls of the family who once owned them may find rest as once again these pieces adorn and beautify the Shabbat experience.

It is highly unlikely that I will ever know for sure who he was, my friend who used these shakers as I do now. I will likely never know where this ornate pair has come from and how far they have travelled. I will never really know under what circumstances they arrived at the place where I found them. But this is what I do know: although I paid for them, I do not own them. These are not mine; they cannot be owned. I am only the caretaker. I am a part of the wheel that turns time with the precious traditions of what preceded me that protects the continuity of who we were and what we will be and what is to come.

I am the caretaker of these unassuming objects, void of voice; they are a symbol of our resilience and continuity. Reflecting off the silver globe is a glint from the light of the Shabbat candles burning nearby. This focuses me. I am sending a message to my brother from another time who, like me, has salted his challah. My dear friend, know this wherever you are and whoever you may be: we have not forgotten you. We have flourished. We have thrived. You are back with us now. We are together. You are redeemed.

Happy Pesach to all our clients, friends and family.

— Bunny Berke & Larry Lusko
Happy Passover.

Wishing you and your family a happy and healthy Pesach.
Chag Sameach!

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They were carving a dirt road into the field of wheat on the other side of the gravel highway that ran past our farm. I watched from our yard and wondered at the mess of trucks and tractors moving large metal shapes that made less sense to me than my own scattered toys.

Days later, as if by magic, tall, round tanks stood shiny and bright beside an oil well pump that mindlessly, repeatedly, nodded its head. At the top of a towering pipe, a yellow and orange flame billowed in the wind. From the peak of the flame, black smoke twisted into the clear blue sky.

The trucks and crews were gone. There was only silence. Once in a long while a tanker truck paid the pump a visit.

From time to time, my mother talked about the oil well. About the constant flame that escaped from that tall, tall pipe. She said that someone might throw us into that flame.

I said nothing, too afraid to ask for more.

Who, I wondered, would do such a thing? Why was she even thinking such thoughts? I saw in her face that she believed it really could happen.

I saw that it had happened before.
I was born in Czechoslovakia, she tells me. When the Nazis came they took me away together with my parents and younger sister. You know how they sent people to the left or to the right – to live or to die – well my father was young but had grey hair so he went directly to the gas chamber. They sent my younger sister to that side also but she ran to mother and me on the other side. A guard put his hand on her arm ready to drag her back but for some reason stopped saying what does it matter – you will die anyway.

My sister and I were sent to an aircraft factory in Leipzig. Germans who were anti-Nazi were there also but they were treated better than us. A German woman took pity on us bringing sandwiches – so we survived.

You know that factory is still operating. I wrote to them years ago telling what happened to me. They invited me to visit – said they would like to give me an award but I never went.

The Janusz Korczak monument in Warsaw, Poland.
Avraham

ALVIN G. WINESTOCK

You sit comfortably,
Arrayed in your essential keppel –
A lofty black satin headpiece,
Prominent, ceremonial –
Supplemented by pious black robes
In this posed photograph
From some studio in Lithuania
Circa 1915.

The table before you
And the well-thumbed books upon it
Appear to fit with the kindly bearded face
And soft eyes,
Portraying a devout and possibly learned man.

But the hands, one positioned down by your lap,
The other holding an open book,
Suggest an added dimension to your makeup.
These are the hands of a workman
Not those of a scholar.

Who were you then?
I am your great-grandson and namesake.
I must know.

According to family lore,
In the town of Birzh
Your occupation was that of horse dealer.

Were your devotional robes
Provided for this sitting
As part of a standard studio façade,
Like so many cap-and-gown photos,
To portray you as more learned
Or more pious
Than your life’s circumstances allowed?

Along with your worldly responsibilities
To family and community
Were you somehow able to fulfill
The commandment to spend time
In sacred learning?
Or was the portion of your adult life
Originally intended for study
Chronically usurped
By duties of livelihood,
Between which you may have managed
To insinuate your heartfelt daily prayers?

In other words
Is this photograph representative
Or aspirational?

Surely,
Whether portraying who you were
Or projecting who you longed to be,
Even to this day,
Are you not authentic in either case?
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The Man with Red Hair

FIONA GOLD KROLL

Yankef heard the crack as he hurried toward his tavern on Kowalska Street in Lublin. When the second pop echoed around the cobblestone square, he knew it was a gunshot. Only steps away from his inn, Yankef ducked inside a doorway, his breath rapid. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the sweat from his forehead before he ran head down the street toward the tavern, holding his kippah on top of his red hair. With trembling hands, Yankef guided the key in the lock and turned the handle. Once inside, he bolted the door and stood for a moment, his back against the wall, eyes closed, heart pounding.

In the storeroom, Yankef poured water in the white basin and splashed his face several times, wondering if the gunshots were merely a bad dream. It was too early for a drink, but he poured a glass of whiskey to settle his nerves. Suddenly he heard someone pound on the back door.

"Open up, it's Moshe!" Yankef ushered Moshe inside and locked the door behind him. Moshe looked ashen, his hands trembled.

"Was anyone hurt?"

"No, but the robber stole money from the butcher."

Yankef poured another shot of whiskey, and they both sat down in the storeroom. Moshe downed the whiskey in one gulp.

"Yankef, the police want to talk with you."

Yankef stood up and paced the floor.

"I started running when I heard the gunshots," Yankef’s voice quivered. “I don’t even own a gun. But the police won’t care if I’m guilty or not, they just want to make an arrest."

Still, he thought as he walked back and forth, he was a respected member of the community, the police trusted him. But he couldn’t prove he didn’t hold up the butcher.

"Moshe, I need your help." He grabbed a piece of paper and scribbled a message to his wife.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
My dearest Shaindel,

The police are looking for me. They think I robbed the butcher and assaulted him with a gun this morning. I didn’t do it. I don’t own a gun, and I wouldn’t know how to fire it if I did! I have to hide for a while. Do you remember the cave near the river? I’ll go there. Bring me food and water when you can, but don’t tell anyone where I am, and don’t let anyone follow you. Just tell them I went to Warsaw to purchase wine for Passover. “Here are the keys, but before you open the door, take this letter to Shaindel. She will know what to do. If anyone comes looking for me, tell them I went to Warsaw to purchase wine for Passover.”

Yankef

He stuffed the letter inside an envelope, ran his moist tongue around the flap, sealed it and handed it to Moshe. “The police are looking for me. They want me for robbing the butcher and assault in Kaza- now. To Fumanska Street and knocked at the door. Shaindel looked puzzled when she saw Moshe but invited him inside, wiping her hands on her apron, as they walked toward the kitchen. A loose strand of hair hung over her forehead, and she tucked it inside the kerchief covering her head. “Come sit down,” said Shaindel pointing to a chair.

Shaindel took the letter from Moshe and read it through twice. “Moshe, we both have a job to do. Can you manage the tavern yourself?” “Of course, I’ve worked with Yankef for years.” “But if you need help, ask me.” Moshe smiled as he walked to the door. He had known Shaindel since they were children. It seemed like yesterday when her long wavy black hair shone in the sunlight when she played with her younger brothers and sisters. As they grew up, Moshe hoped Shaindel’s parents would consider him as a match for her. But who could blame them for choosing Yankef? He excelled in his studies and became a respected member of the community. Everyone liked Yankef, including Moshe. And when he offered Moshe a job at the inn, he accepted.

Moshe walked back to the tavern and swept the floors before he opened the doors for business. The first person to enter was a crusty, ruddy-faced policeman. “Where’s Yankef?” he said officiously. Moshe cleared his throat and hid his shaking hands behind his back. “He’s in Warsaw. He went to buy Passover wines for the store.”

The policeman grunted, walked out the door and headed down the street toward Yankef’s house. Moshe knew Shaindel would give him the same story, and she did. Though it seemed like weeks, Yankef spent seven days in the cave. Before dawn each day, when dew still covered the grass, Shaindel carried food and water to Yankef, looking over her shoulder, ensuring no one followed her.

One morning, word quickly spread that the police arrested a man with red hair who had terrorized towns and villages from Lublin to Radom. Police captured him after he assaulted the rabbi in Kazanov and tried to rob the small synagogue of its Torah crowns and finials. Yankef sank into Shaindel’s arms when she ran to tell him the news. Relieved, they walked home hand in hand. “Tatti!” the children cried out as they ran toward him. But Shaindel shooed the children outside. “Go play; Tatti is tired. He’ll read you a story later.”

Shaindel boiled water and filled the metal bath for Yankef. And after he soaked his tired body, she sat down to a plate of steaming soup. “I have to see Moshe.” “Ask him for dinner this evening,” said Shaindel.

When Yankef opened the door to the tavern, Moshe came running over to him. The two men hugged. “Yankef, sit, I’ll pour us a drink.” Yankef held up his hand. “Moshe, we’ll celebrate tonight. Close the tavern early, and come for dinner.” Moshe’s eyes welled with tears. I may not have married Shaindel, but I gained a friend in Yankef, he thought. After dinner that night, Shaindel excused herself and went to bed. Moshe and Yankef sat in front of the fire sipping hot tea and reminiscing about the past. And when the last flame flickered in the fireplace, Moshe put on his hat and coat and shook his friend’s hand. “I don’t know if I will ever be able to repay you, Moshe.” “We’re friends, Yankef, you owe me nothing.” “You’ll come to us for Pesach?” “Of course, I always do.”
HAPPY PASSOVER

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Seasonal Rehearsal

BRANDON MARLON

We, the people, reenact our salvation, recollecting over matzah and merlot the tide of events escorting us forth from servitude to liberty; perennially imperiled, we dismiss millennia and return to the sea – pulsing, swelling, heaving, churning, surging – and visualize pillars of cloud or fire, feeling jagged wilderness underfoot.

We scent anew the Tabernacle's myrrh, shiver from the chill of desert at night.

Downing mouthfuls of kreplach and squab, who can help wonder if even manna from heaven ever tasted this savoury, and of what sauce complements quail?

Eventually Nirtzah nears, and it occurs to those bibulous but moderately alert that from that time to this, queries differ little: How long till we reach our land of promise? Will providence purvey along the journey?

Song closes the eve once all have received just deserts, deified tyrant and angel of death alike, in the storied order that restores, reviving survivors, heartening the young, renewing hope in spirits that yearn.
Czernowitz

KENNETH SHERMAN

I

She’s ninety-two with dementia and wants to know when they’re evicting her. When I remind her, “This is your apartment, you own it,” she blinks back at me in disbelief.

On her worst days she relives her adolescence in the camps, telling me she’s afraid to take a shower, afraid to cry because in this place, she insists, they punish you if you cry.

II

I remember her younger self, the thick accent she brought from Czernowitz, birthplace of Paul Celan.

Once I asked her if she preferred his poetry to Rilke’s, and her response, “Different birds, different songs,” was a classic bit of Mitteleuropean wit.

In Czernowitz, she went to lectures, befriended the Yiddish actor Sidi Thal, attended concerts by the immortal tenor Joseph Schmidt, who by all accounts, including hers, “sang Mozart like an angel.”

III

Weeks before the Germans stormed in she had the chance to flee to Bucharest, but stayed thinking she’d be safer in the provinces. Many in Bucharest survived, while those in Czernowitz…

IV

The camps. She spoke of them reluctantly, preferring to recount her liberation, the trek west to a refugee camp near Naples, the transatlantic crossing to Halifax and her Canadian romance, then marriage, years of hard work followed by decades of what she called “the good life” – children, grandchildren, season’s tickets to the symphony, ballet.

Why, I’d like to know, doesn’t Memory provide her with an aria sung by her beloved Schmidt, or at the very least with a few dark, confirming lines by her countryman, Celan?

V

Art, we are told, is long. Terror, it seems, is longer, more deeply etched.

And all anyone can wish for her now is a mind as calm and blank as the snow-filled farm field she used to watch from behind the barbed wire fence.
Jonathan Birnbaum decided he wanted to become a rabbi early on in his life. Young and idealistic, he sang in the shul choir, attended Torah study and led youth services every Shabbat. After graduating from the University of Toronto with a bachelor’s in psychology, and prior to attending rabbinical school, he trained in a postgraduate counseling program that he believed would enhance his skillset for his chosen career. Now nearly 35 and established as the junior rabbi of a traditional downtown congregation, he had also helped found a clinic serving families and youth in crisis. Somewhere along the way, he discovered that his congregants, like many people in today’s complex, urban society, were far from immune to developing personal and marital problems.

Alex Kantor, Jonathan’s former Sunday-school teacher and a longtime member of the synagogue, came into his office one day and poured out his heart to Jonathan about a very difficult problem that he was experiencing. “Rabbi,” he lamented, “Sonya and I have been married for 15 years. I was as devoted a husband as any woman could ask for, and raised her kids as though they were my own. I go away for just one short week, and she’s moved in with Sol Bernstein, our longtime family dentist. How could she do this to me – just throw me away like an old shoe?”

Alex was clearly very distraught. He began to stare into space as he sat slumped over in his chair. His eyes were red from crying. Jonathan could see that it was all too much for him to bear and wished that he could take his pain away. He would try, over time, to help him understand the circumstances that had led to the end of his marriage and to develop inner strength so he could move on with his life. Clearly, Alex had been ignoring all the red lights flashing at him for a long time. When Sonya walked out, it came as a total surprise to him.

Later that evening, Jonathan visited his mother, who lived in an upscale condo building at Yonge and Bloor. She enjoyed living downtown and had moved there from Bathurst Manor a year after Jonathan’s father passed away. Over dinner she went into her usual spiel.

“You know, Jonathan, I won’t be around forever. It would make me very happy if you met a nice girl and settled down already. Being alone is no life for a rabbi. You’d think the girls would have eaten you up by now.”

Precisely, thought Jonathan. That was what he wanted to avoid: being eaten up. As a single man, he was an outsider looking in when it came to the trials and tribulations of married life. Tall and lanky with dark brown eyes and a seductive smile, Jonathan had no trouble attracting women. However, he tended to keep the ones he met at arm's length in order to avoid being entangled in the hopeless web of spousal relationships that he now encountered, on an almost daily basis, in his professional life.

After dinner, Jonathan had plans to go to a klezmer concert at a nearby Jewish community centre, with his friend Maxine, whom he’d known since his high school days. A guidance counsellor at a private boys’ school, she was tired of being single and longed to get married and have children. She liked to share her stories about the men she met with Jonathan, and tended to go into detail about her struggles to find the right guy.

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He realized that the person he was looking at was, in fact, a very lonely man.

“Rabbi Birnbaum, I can’t believe it! Is it true?” Jonathan asked. “You’ve been such a light in Sam’s life, and was really cherished. Could life get any better than that?”

“Heard on, Maxie,” Jonathan said as he stood up from the table. “It’s been a long day and I feel a bit grungy. I’m just going to wash my hands.”

As he began to run the water in the men’s room sink, Jonathan sensed that something was, in fact, a very lonely man. As she looked up from her menu, her eyes seemed to dance and her voice had a lilt to it, he saw that her eyes seemed to have a tinge of sadness in them. After staring into them for a few minutes, he realized that the person he was looking at was, in fact, a very lonely man.

The impact of this realization jolted him to his core. He began to feel as though something was creeping up inside him, exposing him to a whole new perspective on life. This sensation perplexed him but it also excited him. It was not clear to him what was happening but he was certain that he was not ill. Then it hit him.

He was tired of being alone. Avoiding relationships was not working for him and he understood that he wanted to experience life to the fullest in spite of the risks that came with the territory. He wanted what Sam had found for himself: a life worth living.

As he left the men’s room and began to walk back into the coffee house, he saw Maxine sitting at their table, across the room. She had a big smile on her face as she waved to him and looked very happy. He understood that he wanted to experience life to the fullest in spite of the risks that came with the territory. He wanted what Sam had found for himself: a life worth living.
Secret Sister

SHIRLEY MULHSTOCK BRODT

I am Rachela, daughter of Mordechai and Leah. I am here with my parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. I am relieved to be reunited with my family, but until recently I was not at peace. I am forever 15 years old. I am Rachela, neshamah of my departed namesake.

I was born in 1946 in the Foehrenwald displaced-persons camp in Germany. As the camp was scheduled to close in 1949, my dear parents decided that we would immigrate to the United States.

I knew nothing of this, however. I was born with porencephaly. I could not suckle at my mother’s breast, I was blind, I had epileptic seizures and, as I grew a bit older, it turned out that I also could not speak on my own or walk. My medical forms classified me as a “congenital idiot” and “mentally defective”. There was a hospital at the DP camp, and that was where I was placed. From there I was transferred from one hospital to another. As we were about to leave for the U.S., my parents learned that not only did American immigration laws forbid entry to the disabled, but also that their resettlement application to the International Refugee Organization had been refused – rejected because of me, their incurably damaged child.

My parents had a desperate decision to make, one shared by hundreds of parents in a similar situation: Should they leave me in the care of the German hospitals and move to the U.S., or should they stay? They didn’t have the luxury of time to decide, due to the camp’s imminent closure. My mother told me that the doctors and childcare workers were relentlessly pressuring them and other parents to keep their disabled children in hospital and to get on with their lives. So conflicted were my parents that when they made their fateful decision to leave for the U.S. without me, they failed to fill out the legal documents required for my care. So my papers were stamped “abandoned child”.

Slowly my parents rebuilt their lives in their new land. My mother wrote frequently to St. Phillips Hospital in Goddau, where I lived most of my short life, to enquire about me. A few years later, my mother gave birth to another daughter, Annie. Annie, my healthy and happy sister.

My mother stopped writing to the hospital. Slowly my parents rebuilt their lives and cousins, finding one name and a link to another and then another and yet another. Annie’s cousin Salina, or Sali as she was called, lived in Montreal. She thought often of her father, who was sick during most of her childhood and had died too early. What did she really know about him other than that he had been sick and died and that she still missed him terribly? It was as a result of her melancholic reflections that she began her genealogical research. The wonders of the Internet! Here she found her father’s father, Chaskel, who had escaped Europe and made his way to, of all places, St. Louis, Missouri! And here were his death certificate and a photo of his gravestone. Here was her father’s mother, Reisel, murdered in the Sobibór death camp, and here was the exact date that she was murdered! Hitler, yimach shemo ve’zichro, may you rot in hell and your name and the memory of you be obliterated! This hobby of hers was no longer a hobby, she realized. She was now on a mission: to find as many relatives as possible and document their names and lives so that they’d never be forgotten.

“Zadie Chaskel, I’m sorry that you died alone,” she lamented. “I didn’t know about you, I didn’t light a yahrzeit candle! And dear Bubby Reisel, I beg you to forgive me for not knowing!” How many others had died alone and their names and lives forgotten? Her research took on an urgency of such magnitude that she felt that her neshamah had been imbued with a higher purpose. She spent weeks online feverishly hunting for the names and fates of uncles and aunts and cousins, finding one name and a link to another and then another and yet another.

Sali would phone her cousin Annie before yamim tovim and sometimes in between. They often joked about knowing that they were cousins, but not how they were related. And now, through her research, Sali found the connection: Annie’s mother’s father and Sali’s father’s mother were brother and sister – one mystery solved! She phoned Annie about her discovery and was a bit disappointed by Annie’s lukewarm reception of the news. “How many others had died alone and their names and lives forgotten?” Her research took on an urgency of such magnitude that she felt that her neshamah had been imbued with a higher purpose.

I spent my life, such as it was, in a state of unawareness – though in death I am aware and comprehend it all. Ludwig Joseph, a Jewish man from Frankfurt, was appointed my legal guardian. It was he, along with the Jewish community of Frankfurt, who ensured that my body was buried in the city’s Jewish cemetery. No one came to my grave, no one said Kaddish for me, no one lit a yahrzeit candle, no one remembered me during yizkor services. It was as if I’d never existed. I, the soul of Rachela, was in anguish.

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And then came another mystery, one that for Sali turned out to be the mystery of all mysteries, the solution of which transformed her.

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On a DP card from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee were typed Annie’s parents’ names and another name, Rachela, all at the Foehrenwald DP camp in Germany. Who was this Rachela, and why were her birth date and birthplace recorded there? Time to phone Annie, who was sure to point her in the right direction. Curiously, Annie had no inkling as to who Rachela was, and she didn’t enquire further about the name or why it existed on her parents’ card. Sali was perturbed by her cousin’s seeming apathy, and she felt a sense of unease overtake her.

Back to the computer and another site this time, that of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Amazingly, there appeared Rachela’s name! Sali completed the online form, requesting Rachela’s file. Weeks went by, but no file. A sense of foreboding overtook her and increased with each day’s non-receipt of the file.

Then, one morning, there was the dreaded email with attachments. Porencephaly. Congenital idiot. St. Phillips Hospital. The last of the documents was dated 1954. What had happened to Rachela, and was she still alive? Sali plugged in the hospital’s name, and it still existed! It was now a long-term care facility for disabled children. Figuring she had nothing to lose, Sali emailed the director to ask if the hospital’s archives had anything on Rachela. He replied quickly that, yes, they had her file and would send it by regular mail! Several weeks later, the envelope arrived. Enclosed were copies of medical documents, letters from Rachela’s mother, a photo of the child and notifications of Rachela’s death and burial. Sali wept for sweet Rachela and the horror of it all.

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Today was my yahzreit, and Sali lit a candle for me. The first time in my eternity that I was remembered and my existence honoured.

I visit Sali almost daily now. I hover near her as she pores over the many documents she’s received about me. Among these is a copy of a photo taken of me when I was about three years old. I am being held by Ludwig Joseph, my legal guardian. You can see part of his arm wrapped around me and a bit of his face. Sali is mesmerized by the photo. She is smitten with me and thinks to herself, “What a beautiful child!” She is unaware that I am with her, unaware that her soul and mine have become intertwined.

What she does know is that she now has her own moral dilemma: should she tell my sister, Annie, about me, so that Annie could light a yahrzeit candle and tell her grown children they had had an aunt? Perhaps, Sali reasoned, when Annie’s children had their own children, they could name one of them after me. Who was she, Sali asked herself, to perpetuate the secret of my being, to withhold such crucial information? Sali spoke to a rabbi, who advised her not to tell. What good would it do now, he said, and might the danger be that Annie would think badly of her beloved parents because of their abandonment of me? The rabbi advised Sali that she herself should light a candle.

She called Annie today, my yahrzeit day, and asked Annie what our parents had told her about their time in the DP camp. Annie said that our parents didn’t talk about those days and that she’d never been curious enough to ask. Or maybe too afraid to ask, thought Sali in a mean-spirited moment. She knew she’d been disingenuous during the phone call, and she despised and berated herself long after the call had ended. I was there with her but could not console her.

So here I still am with Sali, who thinks about me constantly, unaware that I have embedded myself in her neshamah. There is nothing that my heavenly spirit can do to assuage her pain. She cries over me, her sleep is disturbed because of her sadness over my life and death as well as her having concealed from Annie the fact of my having existed. The knowledge of me is tormenting Sali, but my knowledge of her is consoling me. A celestial paradox.

What I, Rachela neshamah, do know is that even in death, I have experienced a type of t’chiyat hameitim, a resurrection of my being, a restoration of my existence. May Hashem in His infinite mercy grant Salina, my sister-soul, comfort in that knowledge. Amen.
The Anniversary

WENDY JOAN UNGAR

Rachael Silverman stood in the thickening throng waiting for the speeches to start. To start – and to be over with already. It was almost 11 in the morning and the wind was sinking its sharp teeth into the tops of her ears. She despised ceremonial remembrances of 9/11. She didn’t need a teary crowd and a bunch of dismal city officials making speeches about sacrifice and strength to remember Danny. But her daughter Shira had insisted and Rachael didn’t have the energy to protest.

Shira picked Rachael up from her Brooklyn brownstone at 10. Rachael had insisted on a cab. She allowed her daughter to think her refusal to take the subway was the fear of an anniversary terror attack. But it wasn’t so. As a civil engineer, Rachael knew exactly how old the city infrastructure was and the corrosion in the supporting beams that had already begun to appear. Just the week before, silt had fallen through a crack in a Brooklyn subway tunnel to track level. The line was closed overnight for repairs. But how does one repair a thing that was already beginning to decay?

By the time Rachael, Shira and Shira’s two children arrived together at the memorial, the square was filling with people and the sobbing had begun. What was it with New Yorkers these days? We’re tougher than this, Rachael thought, as she reached for the hands of her two small grandchildren. Rachael looked around. The ground had disappeared under the incoming tide of people. Not able to see it, she felt unsteady on her feet. Rachael moved her gaze to the huge screen to the right of the stage. She watched as the mayor, deputy mayor, police chief, fire chief, poet-in-residence and various others eager to get in on the act arranged themselves on the dais. Just as Rachael leaned over to complain to her daughter about having to wait, she saw him striding toward them in a crisp tan trench coat and brown and yellow plaid scarf, uncharacteristically hatless. Clinging to Rachael’s ex-husband Abe’s arm was his latest wife, surprisingly old for Abe’s tastes. The old new Mrs. Silverman. Was it number three or number four now? Who knew? Who cared.

“Pop!” Shira exclaimed. Instructing her children to stay with their grandmother, Shira went over and hugged him warmly, saying a polite hello to the current Mrs. Silverman, who grabbed Abe’s arm a little more tightly. Abe smiled uncomfortably at Rachael who turned away, pretending to busy herself with her grandchildren who, the moment they caught sight of their grandfather, pulled away and ran over to him.

Abraham Silverman had a long career on Wall Street and knew how to close a good deal when he saw one. On their first date, Abe chewed with his mouth open and talked too much about himself, just like all the others. But unlike the others, he looked into Rachael’s eyes when she spoke and didn’t balk at her career as an engineer. When the check came, he didn’t take it, insisting instead that they split it. Rachael was equally offended and impressed. And when he didn’t call her for three weeks after the date, she began wondering when he would. Rachael accepted Abe’s proposal when it came six months later. The wedding ceremony was short, the subsequent dancing long and the meal of roasted chicken perfectly adequate. After the meal, the rabbi began chanting the Sheva Brachot, the seven blessings for the new bride and groom.

Abe leaned over to Rachael, entwining his arm in hers. “Happy?” he asked. She smiled lovingly at her new husband, grasping his hand in hers.

“Me too,” Abe kissed her hands and looked into her eyes. “It’s going to be great. And now you can finally quit your job, and we can be really happy.”

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Loud static sliced the air and a woman’s voice bubbled, “Hello? Hello?” as she tapped on the mic.

“Ahem,” she cleared her throat loudly. “Please join me in welcoming our mayor, Mr. Michael Rubens Bloomberg, Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.”

Finally, Rachael thought to herself, let’s get this show over with. She counted the number of people sitting in the front row on the stage, calculating that if each of them spoke for no more than 10 minutes, she might be out of there in less than an hour, and before the endless naming of the victims.

Within seconds of the mayor’s opening words, Rachael stopped listening and began considering what route she would use to exit the plaza and where the best place would be to hail a cab. Or maybe she would walk for a few blocks. Shira wouldn’t want her to, but she could handle it. There were some new condominium developments she was eager to check out on East 10th Street, not that she had much interest in condo buildings – they were all equally horrid – but these were constructed from tenements in what was once a completely Jewish neighbourhood, the very one that she and her father had first lived in when they arrived 78 years earlier. Rachael had few memories of those years before they moved to Brooklyn. She remembered there was a cat that she was enamoured with, and she vaguely remembered the neighbours.

There was one in particular…. What was her name? That yenta who always had her hair in curlers tucked under a kerchief and who smelled of schmaltz…. Oh yes, “Mrs. Finkelman!” Rachael said aloud when she recalled the name.

Shira, Abe and the old new Mrs. Silverman, all turned abruptly to look at her. “Shhh!” Shira nudged her mother in the elbow. “Who’s Mrs. Finkelman?” she whispered, looking around to see who her mother was talking about.

“Nobody, nobody,” Rachael waved her hand dismissively, noticing the Old Mrs. New continuing to stare at her, her lip curled in a smirk, as if Rachael was demented. “Not demented yet,” Rachael thought, laughing to herself. “You want him? You can have him,” Rachael mumbled under her breath as she returned the woman’s look with a mocking stare of her own.

An hour later, Rachael was climbing the stairs to the entrance of her Brooklyn brownstone apartment. She congratulated herself on her escape from the 9/11 memorial spectacle. She snuck away with the barest of goodbyes to her daughter, quick hugs for her grandchildren and one last glare in Abe’s direction between the speeches and the endless naming of The Names. Thanks to her careful planning she beat the crowds who would soon be scrambling for cabs, and, most importantly, evaded the small talk that would have necessarily ensued after the ceremony with Abe and the Old Mrs. New. She was content to have only her memories of Danny, silent and still, for companionship.
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After checking on the yizkor candle still burning on the kitchen windowsill, Rachael made herself some tea and sat down at the table beside the window. She sipped from the chipped pink and blue porcelain cup and looked around at her living space. Her second-storey flat in the renovated townhouse had two bedrooms, with a small living room and kitchen carved into a space that was never meant for that. How the place had been repurposed, the newly imagined usefulness of it, made her feel good. But at the same time, Rachael felt the slap that came with living in another person’s imagination. The brownstone, built in 1903, had been someone else’s dream, and someone else’s home. Perhaps it was the fate of architects and engineers to never be completely happy in their living space – to instead design in their minds some better place to reside in one day in the future and forever. But for Rachael, the place where she felt most comfortable residing in was not the future, it was the past.

Rachael sighed. Abe seemed happy now, finally, after all these years. She searched for the anger that she’d maintained, even cultivated in her heart for so many decades. She had bitterly resented his ex-husband, a living daughter and a dead son. And so she felt most comfortable dwelling in the past, in someone else’s idea of a home.

Not because her past was happy – who says one needs happy memories to live in the past? – but because it was familiar. And because it felt safe. There she could call on her faithful companions: anger, sorrow and guilt. When had she stopped blaming Abe? She couldn’t remember exactly. She just knew that she didn’t blame him anymore. Now she blamed only herself.

She thought more about the memorial. More than a decade after 9/11, she was still astounded by people’s reactions to losing loved ones. All of the grousing, beseeching voices that had formed a chorus of Why me? You could see it in their faces, in the way they grabbed onto each other, in the foundations and monuments they erected in the names of their lost ones. Each one of them believing that they had been mistakenly targeted, ill-treated by God, forced into an undeserved victimhood but languishing in its perks just the same. She envied them their feigned innocence. They really believed it. Not for a moment had Rachael believed that losing her son was an inexplicable Act of God, a bad thing happening to a good person. Not for a moment did she stare into the heavens with a fist or wring her hands in self-pity. She refused to play The Aggrieved like all the others. They used their dead son daughter sister brother wife husband as a reason to be made special, to be anointed. To be sainted.

As guilty as Rachel felt about her failings as a wife and mother, she couldn’t bring herself to say the words, to provide structure to the thought that skirted her consciousness like a delicate shadow – that Danny’s death was her punishment. But the passing years – instead of bringing some peace, some understanding – only made her feel worse. Rachael closed her eyes and concentrated on bringing back the sound of Danny’s voice. It had been slipping away from her this last year, to her great alarm. But no sooner did she bring back his voice, did she hear the words she didn’t want to.

I have cancer, it’s a kind of lymphoma, they’ve started me on chemo. Her only son telling her that he may die. It was God getting in her face, questioning her skills as a mother, questioning her absence from her son’s life for all those years she insisted on working instead of being at home. It was her fault if anything bad happened, it must have been. So it was her fault that Abe left her and her fault again when Danny got sick. No matter how much her rational side tried to convince her that one thing had nothing to with the other – that cancer was impossible to predict – her heart knew better.

And here was the part she really didn’t understand. Her son had not died; he had lived. He survived cancer. And so did she, along with him. He grew healthy and happy again. So why would God give him back life only to take it away two years later? How could God have redeemed her for her failure as a mother only to punish her later with an even greater vengeance? This was the riddle that agonized her – that closed in on her like a tunnel gradually crumbling overhead, with no exit or escape.
The Hardships of a Jew Having No Job Before Purim and Passover

DAVID STERN

Since Chanukah, I have no job and am wondering why it’s happening to me. Sent out so many résumé since then identifying my experience, ambition and degrees. Yet I do not get any more interviews. Nobody calls me back when they are free. I really want to work, which is really the key.

Passover is weeks away and Purim is so near. While many Jews will understandably be rejoicing, I will be worrying about my career. Sometimes I wonder when things will get better? Or will they become more severe? I feel depressed and ask myself, ‘Am I needed anymore within this atmosphere?’

To upgrade my skills I went back to school at night twice a week, feeling I am doing this against my will. Also I am also studying for another technical certificate that I am ambitious to fulfill. Yet still nobody recognizes me for what I can do. What am I, some kind of poison pill?

Many fellow Jews think of me as a success, falsely believing that I make lots of money, having riches beyond what many possess. So when you see me, you don’t see my suffering, my budgetary concerns nor my stress. Just what you can get out of me, money-wise, for an event or donation, more or less.

Would it surprise you to know that I now eat at times at a kosher food-bank kitchen? Get food baskets, will attend a community seder this year and even wear torn mittens? In the winter months I got colds, felt numb and on occasion frostbitten, only to make sure I get out my résumé on time when it was written.

Remember the good old days when you mailed a resumé and got back a reply? Today we have to connect on Wazzup, LinkedIn, Facebook and Jobs-on-the-Fly. No longer are resumés read by a human, but a computer programmed to be cut and dry. So it is all a numbers game, my friends. It’s sink or die.

I end this poem to each one of you with some thoughtful and wise advice. Don’t ask probing, personal questions. Don’t judge or bemoan me. Kindly think twice. If you know a job that fits my education and background, thank you, that would suffice. May you all have a wonderful Purim and Passover. Please be friendly, caring and nice.
A Day in the Life of Molly

ELINA GUTTENBERG

Molly glances at the clock: 6:05 p.m. She tells herself she is not tired, she had a long nap today. It is the day before Pesach and all of her three children and six grandchildren will be coming over the next evening to celebrate. Two of her children, along with their families, would be arriving from other parts of the world tomorrow midday and staying with her. Usually by now she would have managed to cook the soup, brisket, meatballs, haroset and apple cake. But she is already 3:45 p.m.

She had started early that day, around 8 a.m. But by the time she peeled and cored 10 apples, chopped them by hand, made the cake batter, baked the cake and cored 10 apples, chopped them by hand, cleaned up, she was exhausted. She had made the cake batter, baked the cake and cored 10 apples, chopped them by hand, cleaned up, it was already 3:45 p.m.

By the time she had thrown the cake, cleaned the pan, aired out the kitchen, gotten dressed, gone to the grocery to buy 10 more apples, baked the cake all over again and cleaned up, it was already 3:45 p.m. Then it was time to marinate the brisket, which involved chopping onions and celery, scraping carrots and rubbing spices all over the meat. By the time Molly placed the brisket in the oven, it was close to 5 p.m. It was around that time that her second daughter Sarah, who lived an hour’s drive away, called to see if Molly needed anything. Satisfied, Sarah said she was going to prepare dinner. It then occurred to Molly after she hung up the phone that she hadn’t eaten anything since breakfast. She made herself some scrambled eggs with cheese and some toast.

Now at 6:05 p.m., with the brisket cooking away in the oven, she turns her mind to making the haroset. She climbs the stepladder two rungs to the top, her feet firmly secured in her cozy sheepskin slippers (a gift from her daughter Sarah, she would never spend money on such luxuries), and stands on the top ledge. She reaches for the highest cupboard and tugs at the brown, wooden octagonal knob of the cupboard door, a once-envied signature of modern kitchen decor. The Cuisinart, a relatively new appliance in the kitchen at just 20 years old, sits on the third-highest shelf above the counter, just where she had left it last Pesach, wedged in with the crystal drinking glasses.

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Every year she does this and remembers that she had meant to move that machine to a more sensible location but never got around to it. She leans forward to get a good grasp of the machine to lift it. Her arthritic fingers, lately becoming a little crooked at the top joints, hold the sides and she tries to pull the heavy machine forward – but it doesn’t budge. Stuck! Must have not cleaned and dried the rubber buds properly last time. She summoned all her strength and tries again but this time her left hand grip releases and whips out to the side from the inertia of her futile efforts, whacking two of the crystal glasses straight to the floor, shattering into a puddle of sparkly beads.

She gasps and says, “Oy vey ist mir!” out loud from the top of the stepladder, pinching the first shelf with her right hand while she surveys the destruction on the floor. The truth is that her first urge is to yell at someone, but she would never confess this. She eyes what is left of her beautiful, irreplaceable drinking glasses, a wedding gift (from whom?) 58 years ago, now after all these years, reduced to a set of 18. She turned to look down at the mess on the floor – where was that broom? What did Cilla do with it?

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Until God came to our relief and gave us constant belief.

Yet there is an ominous cloud and thunderclap so loud by disbelief or disunity but a strong caring community.

Wholly dedicated to one God symbolized by Moses' rod.

Freedom as a birthright won through a nation's might which made me fall asleep - the seder became too deep.

At the tender age of four I welcomed Elijah at our door.

DOROTHY GOLDWATER

Passover Memories

Paysach Passover

Paysach Passover

Pessach Pessa'h

Pessach Pessa'h

Pesach Paques

B26

and in Yiddish called them with hazelnuts and fennel.

preserved them for travel. In the early biscotti, which means "twice baked." Biscuits, sprinkles, various dried fruits and of mandelbread filled with chocolate I could give up my search and go on the

nothing happens; this hall light has been temperamental lately. She makes a mental note to call the electrician, which she will continue to forget to do for a few more days. She returns to the kitchen and finds the flashlight a reliable relic leftover from the kids' camp supplies. Once home to three children, two parents and of course Cilla, now the empty home seems more like a museum commemorating snippets in time of a growing family in the '60s and '70s. In Sarah's room, the startling psychedelic wallpaper displayed multi-coloured flower wheels that overlapped each other and appeared to be floating like bubbles if you stared long enough. In Ira's room, the walnut bedroom set had its shelves crammed with National Geographic magazines and comics, a treasure chest for his son Ronnie when he came to visit. In Howie's room, a record player with Magneplanar speakers set up on each side took up most of the tiny room, with the shelves of his own walnut bedroom set still filled with albums. The walls of the kids' bathroom were bathed in purple, with two sinks, a tub and toilet to match, and lavender guest soaps in the shape of flowers still sitting in a shell-shaped bowl untouched from 1969.

Molly trudges through her spacious backsplit home in her cozy slippers and plum velour housecoat, peaking in each room tentatively with her flashlight. She arrives at the dining room.

The Tuscany set in cherry finish with matching upholstered chairs is still Molly's pride and joy. She shines the flashlight over the furniture, enjoying the shadowy effects that seemed to bring extra glamour to the decor. The hutch was typically ornate for its time, with a silver tea set visible through the glass door together with other silver Judaica, none of which were ever used. Molly sweeps the chairs with the light and suddenly gasps, spotting a tall silhouette near the dining room chair at the head of the table - then exhalas dramatically once she recognizes the broom.

It is now 6:47 p.m. She has cleaned the broken glass off the floor, after carefully seeking and locating bits of glass. God forbid the children should hurt themselves! She decides that she will do the harocet tomorrow morning after her hair appointment. With Cilla's help, the rest of the work could be done.

She stands in the middle of the spotless brown and beige kitchen, leaning on the broom, thinking to herself in Yiddish, "What am I still doing, exactly? I am 81 years old." Always thinking and preparing for the future (she has even arranged and prepaid her own funeral), Molly knew the moment would arrive when she would have to close this chapter of her life. She knew that one day her reign as active matriarch would begin to fade and she would have to retire to the role of respectful participant at someone else's home, or continuing at her home but purely as a hostess, instead of super-stellar event planner, cook and/or leader. Not a demotion, she thought, shaking her head. Instead of prime minister of family functions she would be governor general, also a prestigious role. She had had a great reign, many years of successful holidays, dinners, celebrations... What was that saying? Always leave the party when you're having a good time. Why should she wait until the last minute, when her frailty will become evident and her children's memories tarnished?

She knows she can afford to cater the whole affair, but it wouldn't be the same. Her people would say, "Safta, no apple cake? Ma, what about your chicken soup?" But if she makes one thing, she may as well make two, and so on. No, if she goes this route, she goes all the way. People would be hired to cook, serve and clean up. For once she would be able to relax with her family and enjoy every minute of the holiday. The thought of catering becomes very tempting the more she thinks it about it - she could get the name of a good one from her wealthy friend, Ethel. Molly's children did not keep kosher; while she is alive it must be in her home, there was no other alternative. Maybe it's now time, she tells herself, as her imagination pulls her further into the fantasy of a work-free holiday. It's a shanda about spending some of their yerusha, but for once she will think of herself, and she knows that's OK, even though it goes against the deeply embedded grain of Jewish mother martyrdom (a sub-religion to which she also passionately adheres, which places emphasis on the children as gods). Her friend, Ethel, would also approve. Isn't that what money is for, Ethel would say? The kids can make their own money. You worked hard your whole life! She would also increase her tzedakah for Pesach going forward, thinking of those who did not have the luxury of choice.

It would be so much easier for me, she continues to fantasize. No more dishwashing for hours, no more cooking and cramming the fridge, shopping for an army... It would be an amazingly easy and even pleasant time of year. I would go to shul in beautiful spring weather and walk home leisurely, without worrying about this dish and that dish that needed to be prepared.

I would even consider finally accepting a lunch invitation - no, no, I am getting ahead of myself. I couldn't bear to do that knowing I couldn't reciprocate.

Molly sat down at the table with a cup of fresh, hot tea and a small plate of kichel. She called Ethel and they mulled it over for hours on the phone, analyzing the juicy new chapter from every angle, just as though they were 18 again when they first arrived in Canada. After the call, Molly decided she would talk to the accountant once yom torah was over.

It was 11:11 p.m. She placed the brisket in the fridge and went to get ready for bed. Even though tomorrow was going to be a long day, for the first time in a long while, she felt lighter.
Ode to the Hebrew Language

CAREY M. KNIGHT

If Russian is a language of snow
With its soft, whispering sounds
sh, shch, tz,
Rocking, subtle, calming,
That evoke snowflakes falling on endless plains,
Grandmothers singing lullabies,
Secrets exchanged under staircases
Careful not to be overheard by ever-present informers,
And the heavy, resonant sounds like oo, yoo, p, g
Are like the thudding footsteps that sink into snowbanks
Under a grey winter sky
Wrapped in a thick fur coat

Then Hebrew is the language of the sun
Clear, simple and direct
Almost without exception
Rough and brusque like its Arabic cousin
But attenuated by ripe dates, honey and sweet oranges
Confident, warm, always conscious of feminine and masculine
Assertive (future is used instead of imperative – if Moti or Sharon or Kobi
tells you to do something, you surely will!)
Connected to the past, like the sign telling you to give your seat on the bus to elders
That is lifted word-for-word from the Bible: המשך קדומים
Yet full of new modern words created by the Academy.
Mekarer: a cold-maker instead of fridge; mahshev: a think-counter for computer,
Echoes of the prophets, peppered with hints of Greek and Persian
Aspikalaira, reflection, or Pardes, the orchard, which also lent its name to paradise...
Compact, efficient, without declensions or complicated tenses.
Everyone has a nickname, every army term has an abbreviation
Every word has its three-letter root (shoresh) and every verb type is an “edifice” (binyan).
We must be on alert for the next war, for an uncertain future.
No time to dally with four or five synonyms
We have deserts to make bloom, seawater to desalinate,
Neighbourhoods to build, a society to craft, curly-haired beauties to seduce...

Come hear the shouting in the marketplace, hear the prayers wafting upward on Friday night,
A reborn language, the heritage of a stubborn, miraculous, resilient people.
Walking on Eggshells

MAURICE KRYSAL

Stalling on our way home from school, we paused at the door, smelled burnt Sabbath chicken, heard pots and pans furiously clanging.

my brother and I tiptoed to our room down the long hallway which lay like a minefield as always, Mother heard those who entered her den.

the ovens of Auschwitz had left her orphaned.

she railed against God in the world we knew.

she wasn’t like other mothers who smiled on our Zenith TV when I was seven I hit my brother his head fell against the wall with a hollow thud

an accident.

I’m sorry, I cried, cowering in a corner as her towels turned pink, she hissed her burning words, a legacy which still aches in my heart—

This is what I raised?
You’re worse than a Nazi!

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YOSEF LISS

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Even if your situation is an oy!
Be grateful for all that has been given to you.
To our magnificent creator, stay true.

For by following His commands does make us better,
perceiving the authentic, we cast off the profane's fetter
and dive into the knowledge that is wisdom.
That acting according to Torah, an improved person do
we become.

Seeing the holiness of our dimension
we climb the heart's and soul's ascension.
To a higher power we connect
and, without trying, we gain people's respect.

Keep learning and keep growing, for that is what you are
meant to do.
Every day, right up until the day you're through.
For the learning never ends,
ew insights do we continuously comprehend.

In the invisible sun of this dream fantasy we call life,
rising above the den of tribal strife,
we direct our spirits above
and connect with eternity's greatest love.

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for Happiness
at Passover and Always

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Are There any Jews Here Besides Rapoport?

David Rapoport

My cover was blown. The jig was up. I had been stigmatized at age 14. After two weeks as one of the guys, I had been ousted as a Jew at cadet camp Ipperwash near Sarnia, Ontario. The year was 1955.

My secret was unmasked when a senior Jewish cadet came to the vestibule of C-Company Barracks to inquire, “Are there any Jews here besides Rapoport?” There was a stunned silence in my platoon as my unwitting betrayer called me over. He was approaching the six or so Jewish cadets in the camp to offer us Friday night Shabbat services at a Sarnia temple. I did not know the other Jews, but happily accepted this kind offer. It boomeranged on me big-time later. No surprise there.

Military cadet training was offered at many high schools in Toronto in the ‘50s. For those of us who did not know better, camp seemed a good way to spend a summer and earn $100. Decades later, it was reborn as a punishment facility for juvenile offenders. The worst was marching in step in the heat of summer, wearing heavy khaki uniforms with rifles slung over our shoulders.

Real military officers ran these drills, and their shouts and insults were just the same as in every comic or serious movie that has been made since. This often ended up with “Inspection”. Our drill sergeant would marshal us onto the parade ground to stand at attention as the officers walked slowly by. Sometimes a cadet would pass out, but he would be left on the ground until parade was over. This was the military mindset for dealing with weakness.

We were living in Parkdale, in Toronto, at this time. My gentle friend Bob could not help me as he was in a different platoon at cadet camp. We were Grade 9 students at Parkdale Collegiate in the ‘50s. His surname was “Canadian”, so he was OK. We had met as Grade 8 students at Queen Victoria Public School and were fast friends. He had suggested this summer program to me not knowing its dangers to Jews. He did not know the prejudice we faced, and being a regular attender with his family in church, he knew the bad rap Jews were getting from some clergy. He knew I didn’t have horns and he sensed that my family, parents and three younger siblings had not killed Jesus. He and another friend asked me, “Why can’t everyone just get along with the same religion?”

The question I feared most at the time was, “What nationality is the name Rapoport?” The answer “Canadian” was never accepted. When my mother took me to register in Grade 8, Mr. MacDonald, the ruddy Scot who was to be my home-room teacher, asked us this. My mother hesitantly answered that we were Jewish. Hearing this, he told her, “Well, that means he will be brilliant or a brat.”

I had been warned by my father never to tell anyone that I was Jewish, and I obeyed. Luckily, my name could pass as French. When confronted about my church affiliation, I generally said Presbyterian, knowing my Scottish teacher would back me up. He turned out to be kind except for the time he slapped my only fellow Jew on the cheek. This happened on school trip to the Royal Ontario Museum. I guess that Nathan was a brat. I kept my head down.

My first exposure to anti-Semitism in Parkdale was not long in coming. The first time we had recess, I noticed a peculiar game called Geronimo. Nathan was facedown on the concrete, while a few of our classmates were lined up to do a hop-skip-jump routine, running about 10 feet to plop on his butt then leap forward, saying, “Geronimo!” Did I commiserate with poor Nathan? That is a rhetorical question. I was asked to participate but I wisely declined because I was unsure whether I would be a jumper or the launching pad.

My classmates were a diverse group. At the time, Catholic students did not join the Protestant school system until Grade 9, so in Grade 8 at Queen Vic my “friends” were either Canadian-born Protestants; immigrants from the Baltic countries – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; or Lutheran Germans. My classmates were a diverse group. At the time, Catholic students did not join the Protestant school system until Grade 9, so in Grade 8 at Queen Vic my “friends” were either Canadian-born Protestants; immigrants from the Baltic countries – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; or Lutheran Germans.

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Most of their parents had fled eastern Europe ahead of the approaching Russian army in 1945 and were accepted into Canada in the late ’40s or early ’50s. They must have taught their children the anti-Semitism I was to face 10 years later.

The nicest kids as far as anti-Semitism was concerned were immigrant Germans. Of course they were keeping a low profile, their parents having slaughtered Jews and Poles and countless other ethnic groups from 1939 to 1945. This shameful crime was rather more recent than that falsely blamed on Jews nearly 2,000 years before.

My first friend at Queen Vic was Estonian. His attitude was that the millions killed were mostly just Jews, no great loss. I now have learned that the Baltic countries were particularly savage. In particular, Estonia, which had fewer than 100 Jews before the war. They were handed over unless I told the group that I had never occurred to them.

Things got even worse for me in Grade 9 when we were joined by immigrant Catholics, chiefly Poles and Ukrainians. They had centuries of vicious hatred and warfare between them in Europe, but they got along in Parkdale. They were on the same page as far as Jews were concerned. Long before Polish jokes or Newfie jokes took hold, I heard a litany of Jewish jokes, chiefly about money. I kept my head down.

These were among my classmates who did not defend me when things got rough in my barracks at cadet camp. The most hateful remark I heard after a heated argument between two of them, said in my direction: “You can call me anything, but don’t call me a Jew.” This was from a kid twice my weight but half my scholastic ability. He once threatened to beat me up unless I told the group that I had no interest in his girlfriend, who had surprisingly sent me a letter. He came over to my metal bunk bed and swayed it back and forth until I nearly fell from the top bunk.

Every Friday afternoon we “privileged” Jews were marched past A-Company, where I remember catcalls and the occasional punch in the arm. The narrative was that none of us were non-commissioned officers (NCOs), ignoring the cadet captain leading us. We were bussed to Sarnia but the rabbi never showed up. We kept coming every Friday. What 14-year-old could resist this freedom? I returned to Camp Ipperwash as a cadet corporal two years later.

One day, at Camp Ipperwash, I overheard one of my fellow cadets from outside our communal washroom utter a somewhat sympathetic word. “Don’t worry about Rapoport. He’s a Jew; he’ll be rich some day.” They were right, but in a different context. Once my family moved to Cedarvale in North Toronto, and I was in school with many Jewish students, I was no longer a pariah. Later, my family medical practice attracted many Jewish families. I married a Conservative Jewish woman, and many of our friends are Jewish. I have become rich in Jewish values.

Leading a good life is the best revenge.
The Onions Of My People

JENNY ROGER

I love onions. There, I’ve said it – it’s out in the open, no going back. This humble, inexpensive vegetable that makes me cry also makes me swoon with joy when I cook with it.

It’s not trendy like avocado, cauliflower or kale; in fact, it is the opposite of trendy, a utility vegetable that adds a background note. When’s the last time you’ve heard anyone talk about how much they love onions? Avocado toast, that’s another story.

So where did my obsession come from? My family, of course. It must be heavily imprinted in my genes by now.

I grew up on a mixture of Ashkenazic and Canadian food. Brisket followed by Jell-O for dessert. It’s from my east European forebears that I share their love of onions.

I close my eyes and see my grandfather Max visiting my family and staying for lunch. He lived in Brantford, and it was difficult 50 years ago to get kosher food there. When he came to Toronto, he loved onions.

There you have it, my beloved onions were also well loved by our ancient ancestors.

Although onions were never part of my family’s seder plate, this meal would not be the same without them. I know the Israelites would have loved seeing them in so many different dishes.

I slice Spanish onions and slowly cook them until caramelized; their natural sweetness brought forward, the perfect foil to the gaminess of sautéed chicken livers. Blended together, they harmonize perfectly.

I could not conceive of cooking the brisket without having it totally enrobed in onions and slathered with crushed garlic cloves.

The onions play a background note in the potato kugel, always there, never the dulce y agrio. I’ve got to try an onions-only kugel, no potatoes needed. And make some baked stuffed onions.

So the Israelites and my grandfather were onto something when they enjoyed their onions.

Onions haven’t made it into desserts yet, but when they burst into the world of dietary trends, I’m sure they will find their way into sweet cakes, too.

With the seders over, I’ll have time to think of new ways to cook with onions. I’d like to further explore Sephardic cuisine and make some sweet-and-sour pearl onion dishes with ancient symbolic meaning.

Onions to order means a reading of the Haggadah and enjoying special dishes with ancient symbolic meaning.

We are connected to our past, our ties to Israel and Jerusalem, as we celebrate our freedom from slavery in Egypt FORSHIPES, an appetizer, made from chopped hardboiled eggs and raw cooking onions, bound together with homemade schmaltz. She was never timid in her application of onions.

Another well-loved eggs-and-onion dish would appear for breakfast, lunch or a light supper. Onions would be diced up, cooked slowly and caramelized, then beaten eggs would be added, turning it into succulent scrambled eggs. This dish also was a favourite on fresh rye bread with kimmel seeds.

Scientists are only now beginning to understand what our ancestors knew about onions. We are all familiar with sweet, salty, bitter and sour as primary tastes; scientists have discovered we have taste receptors (taste buds) for umami. Umami is a Japanese word that refers to a savoury, pleasant taste. These taste buds respond to foods that have glutamates and other amino acids in them. Soy sauce and Parmesan cheese contain high levels of glutamates, and, by adding a small amount of these foods to a dish, they elevate the flavours.

Onions are a good source of glutamates, and cooking them enhances their umami. Garlic has even higher levels of glutamates. So the Israelites and my grandfather were onto something when they enjoyed their onions.

Onions haven’t made it into desserts yet, but when they burst into the world of dietary trends, I’m sure they will find their way into sweet cakes, too.

When the summer comes, I’ll be able to buy some of the new types of brightly coloured onions our local farmers are bringing to market every year. I know it, I can feel it coming – a new trend is being born and catching up to what my people have known all along.
Written in a Few Minutes After Leaving Auschwitz

MARCIA SHUSTER

We left them behind alone without love and caring without that which they had in life but not in death.

We left them behind cold against the angry wind whistling through the gates of hell.

We left them behind without a farewell a kiss goodbye to comfort them as they went on their journey into the dark abyss.

We left them behind with no time for the lone bugler to announce their ascent to heaven.

We left them behind only to remember who they are .... They are us.

Best Wishes for a Happy Passover

Happy Passover!
May you be blessed with peace and happiness.
A CHAG KASHER V’SAMEACH FROM OUR FAMILY TO YOURS.

Traditions are the strongest of bonds: they are the core values that unite a family. For over 93 years, we have been investing in our community and cherishing our clients as esteemed members of our own family.

As we approach the Passover, let’s celebrate steadfast relationships and continue to pass cherished traditions on to future generations.

RICHTER