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Sheroes

An Anthology of Literature and Art

SHEROES

An Anthology of Literature and Art

Manhattan High School for Girls
February 2013

*“How important it is for us to recognize and celebrate
our heroes and she-roes!”*

- Maya Angelou

The Harry and Rose Kaplan Scholarship Writing Award

Manhattan High School for Girls would like to express its sincere gratitude to the Tuckel family for their contribution to our commitment to excellence. The Harry and Rose Kaplan Scholarship Award, created in memory of Dr. Tuckel's beloved parents, inspired the literary journal competition by raising the standard for written and artistic expression.

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SHEROES

An Anthology of Literature and Art

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*Dedicated to the women who opened their hearts
and homes to the victims of Hurricane Sandy*

Table of Contents

Foreword	18
On Sheroes	
By Ms. Meg Ginnetty, Literary Advisor	21
An Introduction to the Introduction	
By Freda Bader	22
Just a Woman	
By Talya Horenstein	23
Shout-out to Mommy	
By Chani Grossman	23
The Last Goodbye	
By Tirza Lehrfield	24
Her Glory	
By Sarala Weissman	25
A Portrait of Courage	
By Aliza Lobell	26
A Woman's Prayer	
By Kayla Knoll	28
Our Motherland	
By Naomi Segelov	29
To Touch a Star	
By Avigayil Rosensweig	30
To Go or Not to Go	
By Shayna Wilamowsky	32
Self-Portrait	
By Rachael Gozland	33
The Strength to Forgive	
By Atara Samuels	34
Unspoken Beauty	
By Devorah Biderman	37
Slipping Away: Stages of Saying Goodbye	
By Chani Grossman	38
Four Cleopatras	
By Racheli Goldberg	42
Silent Tears	
By Leah Bertram	43
Golda Meir, Princess Sophia and a Rebbetzin Walk Into a Room...	
By Atara Huberfeld	44
Woman with Parasol	
By Nechama Buchen	48
Battle of Two Forces	
By Aviva Attar	49

Profile of Mrs. Chavi Levy	
By Tsivia Miller	51
My Old Friend	
By Avigayil Karasick	54
Our First Lady	
By Avigayil Fessel	56
Problem Student	
By Ayelet Buchen	57
The Strange Woman	
Mindi Gelbtuch	59
Lady Liberty	
By Leah Manela	60
The Young Idealist	
By Esther Seryl Rotberg	61
Developmentally Remarkable	
By Chaya Dembitzer.	62
To Pay for Apple Juice and Yogurt	
By Gabriella Englander	65
A Match and an Eternal Flame	
By Sarah Farber	68
The Queen's Stamp	
By Shana Goldhar	69
The Loudness of Silence	
By Michal Cohen	70
The Unforgivable Crime	
By Fraedyl Goldberg	72
My Mother's Symphony	
By Estee Stollman	74
Definreft Wrold	
By Rivky Szczupakiewicz	75
My House	
By Talya Horenstein	78
At the Kotel	
By Yael Cohen, Grade 11	81
Take 1... Take 2... Take 3...Take 613 in Hollywood	
By Chaya Sarah Shippel	82
A Counting Game	
By Chayala Friedman	84
A Woman's Reflection	
By Gabriella Englander	86
Who's the Mother?	
By Dena Skydell	87

Sister of the 100 Year War Shero	
By Elisheva Cohen	89
It's in My Bag	
By Rifky Moradi	91
Profile of My Princess	
By Freda Bader	92
Belle	
By Alyza Lampert	94
Perfection	
By Hadassa Spira	95
Cinderella	
By Talya Leiter	97
The Plan	
By Draisly Friedman	98
I'm Sorry	
By Tamar Eisenberg	102
A Woman's Flight	
By Yaeli Spira	103
MHS Can Do It!	
By Adina Feder	104
A Peek Behind the Iron Curtain	
By Rivka Kurtz	105
Aether	
By Rochelle Checkick	107
Afghan Girl	
By Sarah Mayerfeld	109
Dystopian at Age Eleven: A Profile of Rebecca Stern	
By Mickey Kopelowitz	110
The Woman Within	
By Sharony Polinsky	112
Little Women	
By Miryam Golding	116
Prayers by the Dozen	
By Sarala Weissman	117
My Mother's Wedding Day	
By Shayna Palley	120
Principal Dancer or Keeping My Principles	
By Moriah Berg	121
Snow White	
By Rivky Szczupakiewicz	123
Her Shabbos Table	
By Atara Stern	124

Bubby Greenberg	
By Ayelet Greenberg.	125
The Stranger	
By Tivka Nabaitian.	128
I, Lady Liberty	
Brocha Leah Marmorstein.	129
A Woman in Combat	
By Yedida Kest.	130
The Night I Ran	
By Sheindel Rusanov	131
The Forgotten One	
By Dini Raskin.	134
Fashion Through The Ages	
By Aviva Sokolow	136
The Unbreakable Oath	
Tziporah Fink	137
Sleeping Beauty	
By Michal Usher.	139
Three Disney Villainesses	
By Chaviva Hoffnung	140
I Love You More	
By Leah Berger	141
My Hero and My Shero	
by Renana Witty.	144
My Dear Scarlett	
By Yocheved Butler	145
Mona Lisa in Vogue	
By Yael Cohen, Grade 12	147
Seeing Sideways	
By Rachel Gozland	148
The Bomb Shelter	
By Leah Genkin	150
Double Baggage	
By Talia Alper	152
A Day Old: Three Japanese Memories from the Aged	
By Rivka Salhanick.	154
Generations	
By Elky Melohn	157
I Will Only Come in Peace	
By Tova Sobolofsky	158
The Woman I Am	
By Devorah Shteierman	161

Foreword

My beloved grandmother, an Auschwitz survivor, often tells us about a friend in the camps who frequently bartered her ration of bread for a slab of butter which she would then massage into her skin—an instant facial moisturizer.

Almost seven decades have since passed, but every time my grandmother recaptures the moment, there is still wonder in her eyes. I try to conjure the scene in my mind, teenagers huddled together, reflecting on the day that was, on the days that once were, on the days they hoped would still be.

And then—

“Marta, give me your butter,” she implores, “and I will give you my bread.”

“Please. I need it.”

Silence reigns as the others settle in their places and watch, spectators captured by the stage. The bartering gains momentum, back and forth pontifications about which one is more valuable—the bread or the butter.

And then it ends, and one is massaging her face.

I wonder: Was it a boisterous banter or a combative battle? Was it fueled by frivolity or femininity? Who got the better end of the deal, and what ultimately did hold the greater value—the bread or the butter?

They watch her work the butter into the skin that once garnered all the attention in town. Alabaster. Her face glistens with the oils as dreams of crinoline and color suffuse the stench of dying corpses.

“You fool!” the girls jeer at her. “What will you have from a beautiful face—if you never get out of here?”

“She is so vain.”

“She always was so busy with herself.”

But she does not hear them. She is focused on the contours on her face.

There is still a dry spot on her forehead and then there are her chapped hands she was hoping to soften after yesterday’s work in the ice and then there’s her hair she must fix it is a bit dry and where did the luster go? Why is this slab of butter so thin, and she must pick up the dress at the seamstress (what sparkle on the collar!) and she promised Mama that she’d bake the strudels before starching the tablecloths and arranging the flowers in the colors of her choice and yes she will go with the fuschia because they are not always in season and now they are and besides they will look perfect on little Golda’s head and she promised her that

she would make her a wreath for the party even though a wreath is more appropriate for a wedding and this is just an engagement party but she will definitely craft her that wreath, she thinks, smearing the last bit of butter across her forehead right along the line where the wreath would rest.

When they fall asleep, it is dark and cold and they are hungry and tired and aching to hear their mother's "Gitte nacht, meiynd kind. Shluff git." When she falls asleep, it is jovial and festive and she is overwhelmed that so many of the townspeople have stopped by to wish her mazel tov.

Women of valor—they ensure our survival.

My own woman of valor still won't miss a day of her morning and evening moisturizer. In spite of a lifetime of hardships, my grandmother is lit from within with a love for Hashem and His ways—a luminosity that sparks from her heart like lightning and sparkles on her face like sunshine.

Sheroes, the theme of this year's anthology of literature and art, celebrates the heroic spirit of the woman (thank you to our outstanding English, Art and Technology teachers: Mrs. Lieber, Ms. Ginnetty, Mrs. Olidort, Mrs. Kuhn, Mrs. Weiss and Mrs. Friedman). The brilliant original artistry on our front and back covers exemplify the power of the woman whose deepest dreams—for herself, for her children and for our nation—are the bread and butter of her existence.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ester Friedman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

On Heroines

By Ms. Meg Ginnetty, Literary Advisor

I have always been enamored of single sex education, particularly female education. While this year marks my first as a teacher at MHS, it also marks almost a decade for me of teaching English literature to young women. It is both a privilege and a pleasure to teach in an all-girls' school -- there's a great energy in the air, a spirit of confidence and independence, and an attitude of great, great compassion toward your fellow woman.

So in choosing a theme for this year's literary journal, there seemed to be no more obvious topic to focus on than the feet that walk these halls -- the myriad women whose words, behaviors and attitudes affect us, both consciously and subconsciously, each and every day. Women. It would have to be something about women. And yet the female spirit is so complex, so nuanced, so... hard to write about? I worried that the topic might be too broad. And that is when I looked to one of my favorite women for inspiration.

Maya Angelou. Poet. Novelist. Playwright. Pulitzer Prize Winner. Champion of women's rights and the rights of African Americans. I spoke to Maya (well, I wish! But I read a lot of her words), and she gave me this pearl:

"How important it is for us to recognize and celebrate our heroes and heroines!"

"Heroine." What a remarkable phrase, coined by the brain of such a remarkable woman. By just adding a simple "e" to the front of a word we are all familiar with -- a word that is more commonly (come to think of it) attributed to males -- Ms. Angelou has created the feminine form of hero. It's a word that resonates, that shouts, that sings. A strong word, a musical word -- a word I could not get out of my head...

And so HEROINES was born.

HEROINES is a tribute to all of the women who have touched our lives: both real and imaginary, famous and infamous, living and deceased, black and white, rich and poor, friend and stranger. Through the highly creative workings of MHS' great literary minds, we are proud to be able to present an eclectic host of women whose stories push the envelope in terms of character, content and style.

Flip to any page of this journal and you will find a fascinating female who is sure to intrigue you, inspire you, make you laugh or possibly even make you cry.

It has been a pleasure to edit these stories, to read about the women who have touched the hearts of our authors. We thank the authors for their talent in so painstakingly and beautifully capturing their subjects' lives, and we thank the subjects (and Maya Angelou) for inspiring HEROINES.

Enjoy.

An Introduction to the Introduction

By Freda Bader

Hey there. I'm Courage. Remember me? I have been chosen to introduce Manhattan High School's literary journal, SHEROES, because I meet with every woman discussed. I've been around since the beginning of time, and I don't sense retirement coming any time soon.

My shadow passes over a limping, poverty-stricken woman as she holds her baby tight, determined to hold out against social services (Dini Raskin). I warm Rachel, a girl I find out in the cold night air searching for her distant mother among the stars (Avigayil Rosensweig). My pal Passion takes Malala, a girl from the Taliban, to school, and afterwards, I'm left to bring her flowers in the hospital (Fraedyl Goldberg). Such is my job. But I don't complain. It is very worthwhile.

In North Korea, I support a bruised and bleeding wife as she refuses to divulge her husband's whereabouts (Sheindel Rusanov). Passion stands with the girl with the funny braces and the half-ponied hair in the kitchen, and I wait, because she is going to need me (Leah Berger). I coo at Miriam Dembitzer's unexpected Down Syndrome baby (Chaya Dembitzer), I help a mother drag her children to a bomb shelter as sirens pulse over Ashkelon (Leah Genkin), and together Condoleezza Rice and I forgive her racist teacher and peers (Ayelet Buchen).

I must come across as a busy girl, but I'll have you know, I only serve the few. Not everyone welcomes me; there are those who slam the door in my face. Fear, on the other hand, works to the bone. I sympathize with him, but he and I don't hang out.

Enough about me. It is time for you to read about them. I hope you enjoy interacting with these sheroes as much as I have.

Just a Woman

By Talya Horenstein

First glance
Just a woman
worn, waning
graying, fading
You rush by
to the beat of
the second-hand's
impatient tap
ushering you to
Important places
Second glance
Just a woman
a whisper
faint and distant
but insistent
her words echo
as you scurry on to
Important things
Glance again
A Woman
weathered but strong
a striking song
a melody of history
you could hear
if you cared enough to just
Stop
and Listen.

Shout-out to Mommy

By Chani Grossman

Mommy
Just wanted to drop a line to say
That I'll make more challah soon
And put the candlesticks away in a sec
And could you wash my black tshirt for tomorrow?
And also, well...
I just wanted to say thanks in advance
And that I'll show you my lit journal essay tomorrow
Promise! (bli neder)
And that even if I don't say all those things out loud
Like thank you,
And I really don't know how you DO all of this,
And I really appreciate everything you do,
I THINK them. I really do.
And yes, I'm going to sleep in TWO minutes. Maybe three.
So just wanted to say
Just so you really know
That every time we hang up the phone
And I say "bye" and you say "love ya"
Well, I love ya too.
Truly.
Oh yes, and I'll finish cleaning my room in a few. Really.

The Last Goodbye

By Tirza Lehrfield

The biting wind blew stronger, and she involuntarily clutched the little bundle closer to her chest. It was January, it was getting colder, and that was why it was best that she was doing what she was now. The cold chilled every part of her body, even those covered by her threadbare coat and gloves, and inside, she felt even colder: cold, empty, and numb. But if she stopped and thought about it, she would have doubts. Those nagging doubts that didn't allow her any rest at night. Her whole life was doubts now: Was she doing the right thing?

The wind blew harder, causing her to sway, making her doubt herself again. *Am I guilty, if I am only trying to save his life? Only trying to give him a chance to live?* She knew that by keeping him, he would either freeze or starve or die of disease. She knew this because she had seen it all around her. She gripped him even tighter. Maybe her fierce love for him would keep him alive? But even as this thought tentatively crept into her mind, the logical and quick-thinking part of her pushed it out: It was *because* of her fierce love for him that she was doing this. Because she knew what would happen if she didn't. And this was what strength was, as her father would say. But she didn't want to be strong now. She looked down just as her precious little bundle shivered, his whole body shaking. She clutched him closer and felt his little heart beating...but for how much longer, given what is going on these days? And with that, she held her head up and tried to walk naturally, as if she did this every day. And in her head, she was saying things to him, things he would have to know. *You're going to have a good life now. You're going to be safe; you're going to be in a loving home, surrounded by people who are only friends to you. But there are those, my baby, those who don't want you to have this experience of life. Those monsters who have killed your father and grandparents, and came close to killing you, my baby. And that is why I am doing this. You will grow up not knowing who I am, not knowing who you are, but I am confident you'll find your way. My baby, I love you more than you'll ever know. You'll never know me, but I'll always love you.* And looking up, she saw that she reached her destination. Clearing her face of all emotion, she carefully placed the little child wrapped in a blue blanket on the doorstep of her Christian friend's home exactly at the prearranged time, along with all of the money still left in her possession. She knew that in exactly one minute, the door to that house would open, and hands, not his mothers' hands, would take her baby into a new life. In exactly one minute, she would no longer be part of her son's life. She turned away, tears blinding her vision, and walked quickly back to the Lodz ghetto without looking back.

You'll never know me, but I'll always love you.

Her Glory

By Sarala Weissman

Listen to this story and you shall hear the tale of a shero, the wisest of all.

She was the fourth one after The Leader passed away. The first of her kind to rule. Her people lived terrible lives. They saw things, believed in things that were untrue. They were friends with the Evil Ones, who tricked them, rolled iron chariots into their dominion, captured them and put them under their spell. They fell under the Evil Ones' rule, and for 20 years the Evil Ones' iron chariots crushed and battered them.

The people cried out to the Heavens and sought refuge in their tears, bemoaning their terrible fate and pleading for their suffering to be ameliorated. And that is when She was called from the mountains. She sat under her palm tree, bestowing advice on all those that sought comfort from the Evil Ones, reminding them to repent for their evil ways so that the Evil Ones' power would dissipate and disappear. They listened.

And so she sent her Man of Light to gather an army at the base of the Evil Ones' kingdom. But the Man of Light objected: The Evil Ones should be led by She who has brought the goodness back to the people, said he. If it be so, replied she, the glory will not be yours to behold, but a woman's. So it shall be, said he.

She carried the torch and led her people to battle. The battle raged on through the night, but as the drizzle turned to rain and the rain turned to a maelstorm, the mighty iron chariots got stuck in the mud and the Evil Ones panicked and fled. A great cheer erupted from her people as the terrible days of the Evil Ones were ended, and the glory was hers to behold.

The fate of a people does not merely rest in those that are strong and muscular, but in those that have the foresight and strength to lead, to counsel and to inspire.

That indeed is the mark of a true shero.

A Portrait of Courage

By Aliza Lobell

When I think of “great” women, I am less moved by women who attain great achievements by virtue of the gifts God gave them. No question, these women deserve credit for constructively utilizing their talents, but my definition of greatness is biased toward women who overcome the absence of blessing, those who find strength in the midst of hardship and motivate others to do the same. Rivka Matitya of Blessed Memory is someone who personifies greatness for me, a woman who forever shall serve as my role model of this kind of courage.

My initial exposure to Rivka occurred through my sister, Elisheva, who became acquainted with her during the year that she studied at Michlalah in Jerusalem. Elisheva volunteered in patient care at Shaarei Zedek Hospital, where she was assigned to the oncology unit. She became enamored of one articulate and vivacious young American woman who had been diagnosed with advanced Stage IV breast cancer despite no prior history or symptomatic events. Medically and statistically, her prognosis was dismal. Given her aggressive and highly metastatic cancer, published data offered little precedence for her survival.

Everyone understood that, it seems. Everyone, that is, except Rivka. Rivka’s coping mechanism was that cancer was a chronic condition that she would treat through serial cocktails of experimental medicines and, more importantly, through positive thinking. She truly believed that positive thought could not only facilitate a life of optimism, appreciation and genuine Hakaras Hatov, but that it could also, unbelievably, conquer cancer.

Elisheva first introduced me to Rivka when I visited her at seminary, and I tried to further cultivate that relationship during holidays and other occasions I spent in Israel. As Rivka and I became closer, I joined my sister in helping her at home with her children and her household. I loved spending time with her, and yet I struggled mightily with the illusion she spun around herself and her family that her medical condition was not that serious. Rivka would talk to me about her plans many years hence, about the gowns that she would wear to her children’s weddings and about the role she would play in the Israel of the future. I was only 13 years old at the time, and I nodded mindlessly and approvingly of visions of the future that I presumed could never happen. And late at night, I stayed up and worried horribly for her husband, her children and Rivka herself, all of whom didn’t seem to appreciate how dire her condition was.

Yet that was the remarkable thing about Rivka. It simply was not in her constitution to lose her optimism, much less harbor feelings of depression. As she told me often: “Every moment of life is a precious gift.” She would tell me how lucky she felt to wake up in the morning and watch the sun rise in a reenactment of

creation. She would express the joy she felt at hugging her “babies” and watching them grow into independent people. And she would explain the deep blessings she felt to have the chance to do mitzvohs and thereby repay Hashem in small measure for his incredible kindness in creating her. In a rare moment in which she acknowledged her own mortality, she encouraged me to grab every moment and opportunity for love and growth. “Aliza,” she said to me, “none of us knows how much time we have before Hashem decides that our job is complete and that He needs us back in heaven. That’s true of everyone you know and everyone you love. So work hard to make sure you never have to look back and say ‘I wish I had

done more or said more when that person was still alive.’ We get chances to do some things over. But when a chance for love or true accomplishment comes and goes, we can never be sure it will present itself again.”

But when a chance
for love or true
accomplishment
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itself again.

I worried at the time about the danger of hiding from one’s family—or from one’s self, for that matter—a fatal diagnosis. But I appreciated that it was Rivka’s decision to make. Moreover, I appreciated that there is no right or wrong way when it comes to dealing with hardship, least of all death. Each person finds her own coping mechanisms, and the role of her support group is to nurture that mechanism and help make it work.

I respected that decision, as my sister did, and we tried to provide support to Rivka both physically and later telephonically.

Rivka’s coping mechanism worked for nearly five years, until she died about a year ago. I tried to stay in contact with her and her family throughout this period, to help out in whatever way I could. And while I tried to help her, I know full well that she did so much more to help me.

I genuinely believe that Rivka stared down a death sentence and lived several years longer by willing herself to do so. To my mind, that is what true greatness is: The ability to find courage where there should be despair and to find strength where weakness should logically reign. I don’t know if I will be able to incorporate any of Rivka’s traits into my own character, and I pray every day that I should not be faced with any of the challenges that she faced, but I also know that I will be better prepared to approach whatever life brings me because of my exposure to Rivka and my exposure to the greatness that a woman can achieve.

A Woman's Prayer

By Kayla Knoll



Our Motherland

By Naomi Segelov

My son killed someone. His mother wants vengeance. If someone had a gun to your child's head, would you not want him to defend himself?

The media is biased and persuasive. It's difficult for outsiders to truly understand the pain that I live with day in and day out. It has been so many years since my creator promised an end to my suffering. Yet I believe with perfect faith that one day we will succeed and we will all live securely in peace.

Many have fought over me and my children. Since my creation, I have seen the rise and downfall of powerful nations as they attempt to overtake me. From

I do not think
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the Canaanites to the infamous Roman and Greek empires, the struggle to possess me continues as I am surrounded by my Arab neighbors. But I am not a possession and cannot be destroyed. I am destined by my Creator to be an everlasting home to my children.

I do not think any woman has suffered as I have. While I am so proud of all the success of my children, I am pained as they are forced to endure suffering throughout their daily lives. I see my innocent daughters blown to pieces as they board their school busses. My 12-year-old granddaughter came home one night to find her family massacred in their beds. I watched my tortured son sit in solitude in a foreign prison for four excruciating years. My children in the south nervously anticipate the piercing sirens of looming danger. Families are torn apart moments after they sit down to enjoy pizza.

My life is like a roller coaster ride, sharply alternating between bereavement and joy. When I am held captive by verminous enemies, the blessings bestowed by my creator are withheld. While in enemy control, the soil I walk on is desolate and refuses to bring forth produce.

This was all overturned as I was finally recognized as the legal guardian of my children in 1948. Again, I experienced immense joy in seeing my sons' steadfast victory recapturing one of my most sacred possessions. My children were ecstatic at being able to reconnect with their Creator and live close to me. I feel proud and radiant as my children have returned to me physical beauty, city and farm growth, and wellsprings of Torah.

And yet the ride continues.

To Touch a Star

By Avigayil Rosensweig

It was dark outside and just too cold. Everyone was sleeping. The street lamps cast a dusty glare over the buildings and roads; still shadows formed in the gloom between the light and the darkness. Yellow light diffused out of a few windows where late night readers and diligent students had fallen asleep without turning down their lamps.

Rachel sat outside in the stone courtyard, shivering slightly. She'd forgotten to bring a sweater, but now she had no patience to go back in and get one. She might wake her dad. Anyway, she liked the cold sometimes; it made her feel strong. She laced her fingers behind her head and stared up at the darkness until she could discern a million far-away stars glittering coldly in the night sky. Her mom was out there, somewhere.

Rachel had made an off-hand comment to that effect in the hearing of a classmate a few weeks previously. The girl had given her the strangest stare, somewhere between surprise and sympathy and flat out morbid curiosity.

"I'm so sorry," she'd said. "I didn't realize you mother was... well, *you know*—"

"Hang on, no, not what you're thinking," Rachel had responded hastily. "My mom's alive. She's like literally, well, in space." She'd punctuated the statement with a vague upward gesture.

Rachel's mouth twitched. That had been a weird exchange. There were many women in the ranks of astronauts and astrophysicists, yet people always acted shocked when they found out her mother was on the team of scientists flying with the crew of the Genesis I to Mars. Or maybe they weren't surprised that she was a woman; maybe it was just that she was a wife and a mother, leaving her husband and teenage daughter behind on Earth. Eighteen months to get there. And who knew how long on the planet.

Rachel squinted and placed her thumb against the sky. In the half-light, she could convince herself she was cradling the nearest star on the tip of her thumb. If she could grab one star and bring it down to Earth then... well, Mars wasn't nearly as far away as the stars. But at the same time it terrified her to try to bridge the gap between herself and something so impossibly far away, and she would find herself in the grip of a hollow dread of infinity. The star might be light-years away, and it felt almost dangerous to try to pretend it was so close, as though teasing nature in that way might bring the tenuous balance holding the universe in harmony crashing down around her ears.

Whenever she communicated with her mom she felt that same dread threatening to seize her. She would look at her mother's face and listen to her voice and

at the same time think it was only an image that had bounced around a bunch of satellites and finally been processed by her computer at home. And then, in those moments when she was closest with her mom, the distance between them seemed impossibly large.

So she spoke with her mom whenever the chance arose, but she sometimes feared her mom was somehow fading every day she didn't see her in person and that one day there would be nothing left and her mom would be lost to the void forever. Then the next day she would laugh at herself and her silly notions and she would go to school and be twice as talkative and twice as hearty and go home and flip open her computer and there would be her mom, on-screen, waiting to talk to her. She'd be in uniform, an astronaut and a scientist, surrounded by the white sterile otherness of the spacecraft interior, but then she

And there was
certainly a sense
that her mom
was choosing
Mars over Earth,
adventure over
her very own
family.

would smile at Rachel and become her mom. They'd sit and talk—millions of miles apart—and it would be almost as if they were in the same room. And when it came time to say good-bye, Rachel's mom would look so regretful that Rachel realized she, too, was pained by the great distance between them.

Sometimes, she didn't understand why her mom would put her in this position, this weirdest of limbos. And there was certainly a sense that her mom was choosing Mars over Earth, adventure over her very own family. But then there were nights such as this, when Rachel cupped the star on the tip of her thumb and felt only a wild sense of euphoria. And this part of Rachel, the part that liked to sit in the cold and stare at the stars and dream of visiting them, the part that liked to tease infinity despite finding it terrifying, was mostly just proud of her mom.

She was proud to know people were talking about her mom when they praised the enterprising new generation of NASA, proud to know that her mom was on her way to terraform a whole planet, to prepare a brave new world for human colonization. Maybe her mom wasn't always there—maybe she hadn't even chosen right; Rachel had stopped bothering to try to figure that out. But she was certainly was doing great things . . . and she was always looking out for Rachel in her own way. And that's all Rachel really cared about. So although she was sad and maybe a little resentful about her mother's decision, Rachel was proud, prouder than she knew how to admit, to be her mother's daughter.

To Go or Not to Go

By Shayna Wilamowsky

Bing-bing! 68th Street, Hunter College Station. That's what everyone else on the train hears as the doors slide open, but not me. I hear the voice.

You're here again? Maybe now's the time...

And so starts each day, the age-old debate that occupies my mind on the way to work. To go or not to go. By the time I get to work, I have two lists in my head: the pros and the cons. And every day, the lists are slightly different. A degree is good, I could get a better job—pro. I already have a good job that pays the bills, why work more?—con. I'm so old all the young kids will judge me—con. I have always wanted to go—pro. The list goes on and on. As I throw myself into my work, however, the list of cons grows longer. I don't have the time—con. And by the time mid-afternoon arrives, I can no longer remember the pros.

Is it my fault that growing up I was pushed to get married and raise a family instead of going to school? I wish my parents had encouraged me go, but they didn't. "Who needs a degree" my mother laughed whenever I brought up the idea. "I don't have one, and I still raised a beautiful family." Now I'm not saying that I regret raising my own beautiful family or that I resent my parents for what they did; they did what they did because they thought that it was best for me. And I did what I did because I wanted to make them happy. And now my window of opportunity has passed, and as hard as I wish, an old lady like me can't go back in time. And that's just life...

Bing-bing! 68th Street, Hunter College Station. On the way home from work, as the doors once again slide open at the same stop, something catches my eye. A woman around my age boards the train; she's wearing a backpack. She couldn't be...could she? Impossible. I try to turn away, mind my own business. But as she sighs and pulls a large textbook out of her bag, as she opens her pencil case and begins to take notes on Ancient Greece, there is no doubt: she is a student. My heart quickens.

See, the voice calls, if she can do it, so can you.

That's it. The voice wins. Tomorrow during lunch break, I'm going to apply. No, in the morning, on the way to work. Before the cons have a chance to pile up.

The Strength to Forgive

By Atara Samuels

I saw soldiers die before my eyes. I used to try to nurse them back to health, only to realize that it was too late. I used to be a military nurse.

When it would get too painful, my husband would comfort me and say, “This is why women are military nurses and not men; men would see someone dying and forget it in a few days, but women...women never forget. While the soldier’s names will fade away from everyone else’s mind, you will remember.”

I used to comfort myself with his words, and after he died at the age of 45, I invested all my efforts into being a nurse. I would work 48-hour shifts at a time just to prevent my mind from wandering off and thinking about the pain of my husband’s death.

The day that it happened I was so tired. My hands worked robotically while my mind ached for sleep. The two soldiers came in towards the end of my shift, and all I wanted to do was sleep. I still try to convince myself that it wasn’t entirely my fault: I was *tired*. I recognized the injured soldiers right away as my neighbor, Mrs. Shelby’s, two sons. One of them, Michael, had a foot injury from a fall while running away from an avalanche of bullets, and if not treated right away, his leg would have to be amputated. The other, Daren, had a bullet hole on his right arm, which was bleeding profusely.

But I just wanted to finish my shift already. I took a cloth and hastily wrapped Daren’s bullet wound and then tended to Michael. I figured that some other nurse would take care of Daren when my shift was done—no need for me to work an hour later cleaning the wound, taking out the bullet from the wound, stitching the wound, bandaging the wound...I was just so tired. I quickly fixed up Michael’s leg and left him to rest.

Without looking twice at Daren, I left the room, eager to get into bed.

I walked into my room, ready to collapse onto my bed, when the head nurse came in.

“Suzy, I’m really sorry, but would you be able to work one more shift? A lot of soldiers got injured from the avalanche and we need all the hands we can get.”

I sighed and heavily turned back to the main room. When I returned, I went over to see how Daren was holding up, now that he was officially on my watch. As soon as I saw him, my breathing got heavy, and my stomach dropped. He was laying slack on the hospital bed, his good arm hanging over the edge. His face was pale from lack of blood. The bandage I had carelessly wrapped around his arm was saturated with blood, and more blood was gathered in a puddle on his bedside.

'Till this day I can still remember taking his cold wrist, waiting for a pulse that would never come. I even remember Michael groggily lifting his head and asking, "Is he okay?"

I lied. I swallowed and lied. "Yes, Yes of course." And I hoped that maybe, maybe my lie would come true.

After Daren's funeral, I stopped working as a nurse. I secluded myself from the world, holing myself up in my house. I never told my neighbor Mrs. Shelby about that night. From what she knew, her son Daren could have died from anything—friendly fire, a bullet wound. I couldn't bear telling her the truth.

After a few weeks, to my dismay and terror, Mrs. Shelby started visiting me weekly. She would come in with a big smile, sit on my couch, and tell me about her day, while I smiled weakly, just praying for her to leave...but she never did. She kept on coming back week after week.

While the
soldier's names
will fade away
from everyone
else's mind, you
will remember.

This has carried on for five years. Now as Mrs. Shelby rattles on like she always does, for whatever reason, I debate whether to tell her what happened that night. I don't know why, why today, but suddenly it just came out of me.

"I—I killed Daren," I whisper.

"Excuse me?" Mrs. Shelby asks politely.

"I—I let him die." I start shaking. "It was my watch... I...Um, I was tired..." Hearing it, I realize how feeble that excuse is—why did I let him die? "I thought... I thought it wasn't so serious...I thought another nurse would take over. I'm so, so sorry."

Mrs. Shelby's face falls from her cheery façade. She stares at me sadly and sighs.

"I know."

"What?"

"I know," she repeats.

I look at her in shock. How did she know? Why would she still visit me even after she knew?

Mrs. Shelby clears her throat. "I wanted revenge." She starts off monotone,

but emotion creeps into her voice. “I wanted to find out what happened to Daren. I wanted whoever was responsible to pay. If it was friendly fire, I wouldn’t care, I would find whoever did it and... and...” She stops and gazes out the window in the midst of anger and sadness.

“I pulled strings, made phone calls, and I got my hands on the shifts for the nurses. I saw that Daren was brought in under your watch. At first I thought it was a mistake. I didn’t think that you would let him... We were so close... you used to baby-sit for him, but you—you let him... die?” She whispers the last word as a question, as if she is still trying to make sense of all of this. I can hardly breathe as the tears start to pour torrents down my face.

Mrs. Shelby takes a deep breath. “I didn’t think that I could ever forgive you. But I decided that I couldn’t hold a grudge. I made a promise to myself that I would visit you every week until I forgave you...”

“D—do you forgive me?”

Mrs. Shelby looks me in the eye. “Yes.”

I am shocked. I am...astounded at the strength of Mrs. Shelby. She knew all this time, yet she visited me every week, just so she could learn to forgive me. If I thought I was in pain from these visits, how much more so was she knowing that she was staring into the eyes that let her son die under her watch?

Some might think that I was a brave woman, being a military nurse in the war zone. But Mrs. Shelby, and all the mothers of military men who lost their sons to war, are even braver. Even if they go about their lives as if they have become used to the empty hole their sons have left, they never will forget. Like Mrs. Shelby, they learn to carry on, they learn to hold their heads up high and forgive the people around them. They are strong—even as their world crumbles around them.



Unspoken Beauty

By Devorah Biderman

Slipping Away: Stages of Saying Goodbye

By Chani Grossman

When Malka married Mottel, the entire village danced.

It was a Friday afternoon. Wyszkw on the river Bug was buzzing with Shabbos preparations. Tables were set for a wedding meal; a chuppab was put up outside the shul. The anticipation of Shabbos was tangible, along with that little extra something, that tingly excitement one feels as a wedding draws closer.

Shortly before Shabbos, the chosson and kallab were married, outside, under the reddish gold of the setting sun. Malka stood under the chuppab, her radiant glow beautifying her simple white gown, as Mottel slipped the ring on her finger, and her heart soared as she heard the shattering of the glass under Mottel's foot and the answering, joyous cry of "Mazal tov!"

As the sun set and the first stars began to appear, the kallab lit Shabbos candles for the first time, and the whole village danced.

It was at a different wedding when my mother first saw Malka stop still, blank and unremembering. I don't know whose wedding it was—even she doesn't remember, it was that long ago—but the incident itself is still vivid in her mind.

"Chani, Malka didn't remember my NAME."

I shudder. My mom? Malka's own niece? Michael's only daughter, practically her honorary granddaughter?

"Her expression was...scary." My mom still remembers it clearly. "It was only there for a second, but it was still one of the most frightening things I'd ever seen."

Malka had stopped—stock-still. Her face was smiling, but it was more like a grotesque mask of a smile, rubbery and fake and terrifying.

"I was about to go get my mother—Grandma—but then she suddenly became okay again. She said she was all right..."

"And she knew your name?" I ask, hooked on that. "She remembered it?"

"Yes, she remembered it." My mom's expression turns musing. "But she seemed a bit disturbed about it. She was pretty okay after, but still...of course she was scared..."

The village by the River Bug flourished, and with it flourished Malka's daughters. Malka would watch from the balcony as Toby and Rachel ran and

played marbles and soccer with their uncle Michael, a few years older than Toby (but, as he emphasized, a great deal wiser). They ran in and out of the apartment, snatching cookies, dashing out to the banks of the river to play and squish their toes in the mud.

And so they grew up, surrounded by family and life, always with their watchful mother gazing over them from the balcony.

I'm sitting with Malka, as bold and as confident as only a horror in her terrible twos can really be. We are perched on the stairs of Toby and Aaron's house, where Malka lives, and I'm eating a chocolate tea biscuit. Malka sits companionably next to me, cheerfully blocking the stairs to the front door, chomping on a twin biscuit.

She doesn't know
me, she doesn't
know I'm Denise's
daughter,
Michael's
granddaughter.
She's in her own
world.

I am two. She is ninety.

After that, we go out to Toby's backyard and snip yellow flowers off the hedge with big, black shears to make a bouquet for my mother.

Nobody in Wyszkow had ever seen a plane fly over their town before. Now they flew by in droves.

After shul as men folded up their taleisim, and in the market where women went to buy their groceries, there was a buzz of tension easily tangible in the air, a perpetual crease between the eyes of the worried populace. Rumors exploded. There were whispers of an imminent bombing—but no, we're a small town, why would they bomb us?—ah, they won't bomb us, we're important; we've got the only bridge across the River Bug for many miles...

Toby and Rachel saw the planes, too, when they played ball outside the building. They stared up in shock and childish wonder at the roaring bird in the sky that was sending trails of cloud in its wake.

They saw their mama, walking down the street with a basket of groceries. They bounced up and down, yelling and pointing: "Zest, Mama, a magical bird in the sky!" They saw Mama look up, her eyes widen in shock, panic skew her face. She grabbed them by the arms and pulled them to the ground. Her expres-

sion was dark and horrified. "Get down from there! Kim aber! What are you doing? We can't let them see us!" They lay, belly-down, on the stone pavement, wide-eyed and shocked—what is scaring Mama like this? Could it really be our magical birds?

How could anything scare Mama?

By now I'm seven, and Malka has moved with Toby and Aaron to a duplex in New Jersey. We don't go frequently, and now visits to Malka have somewhat lost their charm. Malka is diminished, shrunken, and will no longer sit on the stairs with me and eat a chocolate biscuit. She will no longer go out with me to pick flowers. She sits on the couch and tries to talk to us, but loses her train of thought and usually just ends up sitting, staring vacantly into space and occasionally saying something under her breath that we can't make out.

We kids stay upstairs, where Toby's grandchildren, Max and Nikki, stay when they visit. There are loads of cool toys in there, and it's more fun in here than out there with a bunch of grown ups, especially ones like Malka.

The Germans were on the verge of entering Wyszkow—the knowledgeable ones knew that it could happen any day now, that the Germans wanted the bridge on the River Bug and, for some reason, wanted the Jews. That was one part nobody could figure out.

The cheder closed, and the children were kept inside by fretful mothers, worried about what might happen in only a few hours' time. Men no longer talked after davening while folding their taleisim—they muttered a greeting to each other as they dashed home, not wanting to risk being separated from their families should something happen. There was no play by the river for the children, and mothers were too preoccupied to bake cookies.

Someone rented a truck, at a high price, to take Jews to Warsaw. It should be safer, being in a big city. The Germans won't notice us, might not bomb us. As it was about to pull out, Malka dashed out and threw her children on the flatbed. Her children would make it safely out at any cost. She clung to the back of the truck, easing herself into the flatbed as the truck hurtled along the road, sixty miles to Warsaw. She watched, struggling for footing, as her town vanished behind her for the last time.

We are sitting in Toby and Aaron's new house in Fairlawn, New Jersey. I'm eleven. I'm too old for Max and Nikki's toys, or so I decide, so I sit in the living room and my gaze shifts to Malka.

Malka has drifted. She stares into space and talks in Polish to someone. It's not Toby, who listens and clucks her tongue sadly, shaking her head. I don't know who it is. She doesn't see me when I walk by. I am invisible. She doesn't know me, she doesn't know I'm Denise's daughter, Michael's granddaughter. She's in her own world.

Mommy has explained dementia to me—that Malka is losing a lot of her memories and her brain is getting weak. It didn't sound so scary at home, but now it does. Now I SEE that she doesn't know me, and it hurts. She should remember me. I'm there. I am a part of her life, a part of her. Why doesn't she see me?

I'm a part of
her life, a part
of her. Why
doesn't she see
me?

We finally leave. Malka stands up, urged by Toby, her eyes dull and cloudy. She walks to the door and gives us each a dutiful peck on the cheek.

Before I step out the door, coat zippered against the chill wind outside, I feel Malka's breath on me, her voice rustling in my ear. It is the last thing she ever says to me.

"I love you, Chanale."

I glance back, and she looks at me, lucid once more, for the last time.



Four Cleopatras

By Racheli Goldberg

Silent Tears

By Leah Bertram

I am surrounded by my grandchildren as I tell my story. It is one that I have told a thousand times and one I will continue to tell... I cannot start from a beginning, for my story truly has no real beginning or end. I will start, however, on the day we three boarded the train. It was one of the last to leave Europe. My husband and baby girl were with me, and we boarded to leave our sorrows behind forever... that was, however, not to be.

We had been on that miserable train for days already, but it didn't bother me. We were together, and that was all I needed.

I shouted for the train and for this life to stop, and yet the train continued to speed on.

After several lifetimes, the train stopped. My husband left to get fresh milk for our little girl. In his absence, time seemed to slow down, stretching each second into agony. I repeatedly glanced out the filthy windows, fists clenched and breaths uneven. To the others on the train, I must have looked mad.

At last I saw him jogging toward me, his smile broad and two bottles of milk clutched in his hands.

As he reached the platform, I let myself breathe freely, but as I let out my breath, so did the train. I felt it tremble beneath my feet and watched as my husband's smile slipped away. At first I couldn't comprehend what was happening. Only once I heard the doors close did I realize that the train had left without my husband. I watched helplessly as he chased us, his mouth forming words I could not make out. I shouted for the train and for this life to stop, and yet the train continued to speed on. In numb shock, I saw my husband chase after it, not stopping for a breath, the bottles of milk still in his hands, thinking only of his family. I watched as he grew smaller, barely a pinprick, and then... nothing.

My baby began to wail, and it was all I could do to not collapse along with her and let our joined misery pierce the heavens. I don't know if her tears were for the father she will not remember or for the life she left behind, or even simply for that bottle she would not get. My silent tears were for her. For the father she would not have. For the family she would never know. For that piece of childhood she had now lost forever. For the tragedy that a baby should not know. My silent tears were for all those we had left behind. For their stories which the world does not know. For the hatred they did not deserve. My silent tears were for my husband. For the death I then feared and now know he met. For the horrors he could have escaped. For the torture he need not have experienced. Yet my tears could not and can never be for myself.

The train and life continued, and I continued to dry my child's tears.

Golda Meir, Princess Sophia and a Rebel

By Atara Huberfeld

Monday, October 15, 2012

Right after school

I hate writer's block. It's the bane of my existence. And here I am, walking out of the school building on a crisp fall afternoon, mind absolutely blank. Not a single idea. Just great.

How can I not have any idea of what to write? I just sat through an entire period's worth of speeches about inspiration for this year's Literary Journal. But a woman hero? Where in the world can I springboard from there?

I slide into my seat on the bus, and quickly realize I'm not the only one drawing a blank.

SARI*: What exactly is a "shero"? I don't get it.

ADINA*: How is this supposed to be a topic? It's so general!

LEAH*: I think I'm just going to write a mini biography about Golda Meir. It seems easy enough.

RACHEL*: But everyone's going to write about Golda Meir! I want to write about something original.

TALIA*: What about an Olympic gymnast? I'm sure one of them has a really great story that you could write about.

CHAYA*: Ooh, if you're going to write about an Olympist, do Michael Phelps!

EVERYONE ON THE BUS: Chaya, SHERO! WOMAN-HERO!!!

CHAYA (*a bit ashamed*): Right, I forgot.

Saturday, November 3, 2012

After Shabbos

I sit at my kitchen table, a cup of hot chocolate in my hand, and I stare at the blank Word document open on the laptop in front of me. I'm doing my work in the kitchen because we have a family who lost power during SuperStorm Sandy staying at our house, and my room got hijacked. I now have two little girls (Leah and Isabelle) sleeping in my room, so working in there is really not an option. Unfortunately, working in the kitchen means next to no privacy.

MY MOM: What are you working on?

betzin Walk Into a Room...

ME: My Lit Journal, and I have no idea what to write about.

MY MOM: What's the topic?

ME: A woman hero. Very specific.

MY MOM: Why don't you write about Golda Meir? Didn't you do a report on her once?

What makes
someone a hero?
Is there even a way
to truly define the
word hero?

ME: Yes, but everyone's writing about Golda Meir. Also, I don't want to just write a biography.

MY MOM: Alright, so what else can you write about?

ME: I have no idea. That's why the document is blank.

MY MOM: I see your problem.

My mother and I sit silently for a while, and I drain my cup of hot chocolate. As I tilt my head back to catch the remaining few drops, I have an idea, and sit back up fast.

ME: Mommy, what exactly does a being strong woman mean to you?

MY MOM: Well, to some people it may be a high power job, but to me it's love of family and commitment to community.

ME: Nice answer.

I enter her response into the computer before I forget it.

MY MOM: Why are you writing that?

ME: I want to write down a bunch of people's answers to this question -- see different interpretations of what a woman hero means.

MY MOM: And that's going to be your Lit Journal?

ME (*sbrugging*): Maybe. Let's see how many answers I get.

Sunday, November 4, 2012

Morning

No closer to inspiration than I was yesterday or the day before, I sit in my

bedroom—correction, Isabelle and Leah’s bedroom. My little sister and her friends are playing., a.k.a., distracting me.

MY SISTER: What?

ME (*repeating myself*): What does it mean to be a woman hero?

MY SISTER: Is this for your Lit Journal?

ME: Yes. Now can you please answer the question?

MY SISTER: Why don’t you just write about Golda Meir?

ISABELLE*: I think a woman hero is someone who’s kind.

MY SISTER: She puts her life on the line to help someone else.

ISABELLE: Oh, and she wears a cape!

LEAH*: I like princesses!

ME: Which princesses?

LEAH: Sophia!

ME: (*confused*) Who’s Sophia?

ISABELLE: She’s a new princess on the Disney Channel.

ME: Why do you like Sophia?

LEAH: She’s pretty!

ME: Alright guys, thanks for your help.

Later that night

My friend Mari from down the block also lost power so she joined the three ring circus at my house and is sleeping over so that she won’t have to wake up at six o’ clock in the morning in the dark. It’s late, and neither one of us wants to go to sleep, but we’re bored, so she agrees to help me with my Lit Journal.

MARI*: I guess a hero is someone you could look up to. Wait, do you want an example?

ME: Sure.

MARI: How about Golda Meir? You could write about her.

ME: Seriously? Golda Meir? Anyways, I already did a report on her in fourth grade. Remember that awful hat I wore?

MARI: Yeah, I do. But my Louisa May Alcott outfit was much worse, trust me.

Monday, November 9, 2012

Computer Class

ME: So what are you guys doing for Lit Journal?

MADELINE*: I'm writing about my mom.

MATILDA*: I want to write about Rebbetzin Kanievsky, but I feel like everyone's writing about her.

SARAH*: But if you write it really well, it could be really good. I'm also writing about my mom. Atara, what about you?

ME: That's the problem. I've still got nothing.

MADELINE: What don't you write about Golda Meir? There's a lot about her!

ME: What is it with everyone and Golda Meir?!?!?!?

I must have said that pretty loud because half the room shoots me strange looks.

MATILDA: Well, you have to come up with something. You're running out of time.

I know I am. But even after all the random conversations I've had over the course of the past few weeks, I'm still no closer to answering my question. What makes someone a hero? Is there even a way to truly define the word hero?

I read over the answers that I've received. I've heard everything from a Rebbetzin to a superhero to a Jewish political leader. But maybe there is no real definition for a hero—maybe everyone just has her own opinion of what makes a person great. To some, it's the woman who spends her day doing random acts of kindness. To others, it's their mother, someone who has done everything for them and acts heroic on an everyday basis. And if you had asked me when I was 5 years old, I probably would have said a princess.

So what do I think makes a woman a hero? Truthfully, I'm not so sure. . . what do you think?

*All names have been changed to protect the innocent!



Woman with Parasol

By Nechama Buchen

Battle of Two Forces

By Aviva Attar

I stand on the front line, gun in hand, bullets, radio and my first aid kit on my belt. In front of me, I can see smoke billowing from the northern tip of the government building and tanks flooding the mountainous valley behind. I hear a bomb explode, causing chaos in the streets. People are screaming for help, and many lay wounded or dead on the dark pavement. The tension is so thick I can't move. Ashes fill the dark sky with their spark, and suddenly the siren to attack blows and I'm running, running from the blur behind me of the black and green army occupying my land.

I can hear the tick of
my watch haunting
me, counting
down the seconds
until the dynamite
explodes...

I try to escape, but they're too fast, and I need to shoot. But my boots, they're untied, so I trip. My hair's a wreck, my eyes are blurred from the smoke around me, and my gun is flapping on the side of me, convincing me to pick it up already and shoot. I pick it up, my hands trembling, almost like epilepsy. I can do it; I need to be strong. No, not strong; I need to be more.

The bullets are loaded and ready to shoot, but I can't, not me, not Tali Backman. I can feel the tangible pressure laying on my shoulders, and I want to sweep it off me and hide in the nearby bushes and never come out. Sweat is dripping down my face, my face paint smudging, and as the minutes pass I become more and more recognizable as a soldier.

It is two nations fighting for just one land, each believing the land is theirs, but who is to know the truth? How can I kill a man fighting for the same thing as me? One no less important than me, who has a future ahead of him? On the other hand, how can I sympathize with someone whose greatest achievement will be my death? And what if I'm killed? My mother left grieving, my sister left alone with just memories of me walking the narrow hallways of my house. I cannot be like my father and perish at the hands of the enemy...but how can I be responsible for taking the life of someone else?

I can hear the tick of my watch haunting me, counting down the seconds until the dynamite explodes...thirty nine...thirty eight...thirty seven...I lift my gun and put it in position to shoot--the back of the gun perpendicular to my stomach and the top pointing up towards the incoming army...thirty three...thirty two...I load extra bullets just in case of emergency...twenty nine...twenty eight...twenty seven...the enemy is approaching me and trying to shoot...twenty...nineteen...

eighteen...I shoot and watch the bullet pierce through the scorching air, aiming right for nothing. Ten...I'm scared...nine...I'm running short on time....eight...seven...six...the army is mere feet away from me...five...I shoot and run away.

I'm crouched 30 feet away from the scene, my knees folded together with my head in between. Four...three...my watch keeps ticking...two...the dynamite I threw is about to explode and the army dispersed.

One...and I, Tali Backman, just became...

Profile of Mrs. Chavi Levy

By Tsvia Miller

The first question I asked Mrs. Chavi Levy as I sat at her dining room table was “How long have you been wheelchair bound?” Mrs. Levy immediately smiled and replied, “I’m so happy you asked this first, as it lets me set off my interview at the right place. I am not wheelchair bound. The implication of that phrase is that you are imprisoned in a wheelchair, while in fact if I didn’t have a wheelchair I would be bound. Therefore, I say I use a wheelchair to get around. The wheelchair is my freedom.”

Mrs. Levy contracted polio 57 years ago at the age of three. She was one of the last people to contract the virus in the United States. The Salk vaccine for polio was announced on April 12, 1955—the 10th anniversary of FDR’s death—but was not distributed immediately, and she therefore was not immune when she contracted polio in August of that year. Mrs. Levy’s legs are actually the strongest part of her body, so for the first few years following the virus she didn’t use a wheelchair all that much. The yeshivas at that time were not willing to accept kids with disabilities, and the public school classes for disabled children—called “health conservation classes” (basically implying that having a disability is the same as having an illness)—had a long waiting list. So long, in fact, that Mrs. Levy was only able to begin school at the age of 9. It was then that she began to use a wheelchair, since it was the first time she was required to move around a lot. Schools then were still segregated. Mrs. Levy and her classmates (who ranged from 4th to 8th graders) were never able to mingle with the able-bodied kids—not in the classroom, and not in the cafeteria. “It’s an insurance risk,” they were told. There were two classes then for children with disabilities. The class she was in was for children who had mobility issues, and the class next door was for disabled children without mobility issues. Their mental capabilities were not a factor in their classroom placement at all.

The polio Ms. Levy contracted has left her mostly paralyzed. Her arms are her weakest muscles, and her breathing is also very weak. There are two kinds of polio—most common is paralytic – where the voluntary muscles are paralyzed, and less common is Bulbar—where the breathing muscles are paralyzed. Mrs. Levy has both. During the interview, Mrs. Levy was eating pretzels. Although her twisted hands were usually able to pick up the pretzels, they many times fell before they reached her mouth. Another effect of the polio is that as a child, Mrs. Levy was confined to an iron lung for four months. She now uses a ventilator at night and sometimes during the day to assist with her breathing.

Although Mrs. Levy seems to be quite disabled, in many ways she is fully en-

abled. She is happily married with two children and a new grandchild. When asked about how she thinks hers and her husband's disabilities (her husband, Michael, is blind) affected their children, Mrs. Levy responds: "I think it has made them more 3-dimensional in their way of viewing people. We love having people over to our home no matter what they look like or how religious they are. We've taught them to look past the surface of people." Of course, there were always times the Levys couldn't do things other families did (like ski trips during winter break), but they were never particularly upset about it.

Despite the fact that Mrs. Levy is completely able to conduct a normal life, there definitely were people who treated her unfairly because of her disability. When Mrs. Levy was still single, there was no question that people absolutely thought it was ridiculous for her to even consider getting married. "I would go on singles weekends and one time a guy asked me, 'Why do you come here?' He didn't mean it to be mean. He just couldn't even perceive that a person in a wheelchair would get married." But still, it was hard for Mrs. Levy to hear these things. She so badly wanted to lead a regular life, and when people questioned the possibility of her dream, it made her doubt herself.

But Mrs. Levy eventually did find her soul mate, and together they have built a very happy and warm home. A friend had briefly introduced Mrs. Levy to a man named Michael after one of Mrs. Levy's concerts (Mrs. Levy is very musically talented). A few years later, when Mrs. Levy found herself with an extra ticket to an Elly Ameling concert, she remembered the blind musician she had met backstage at one of her performances and decided to invite him. Although she did not remember his name, she did remember that he was part of the Zamir Chorale, so she called her girlfriend, another choir member, described him ("a good-looking blind guy") and got his phone number. Although he was not able to attend that concert with her, he called back five weeks later to invite her to a different concert, and that was how their relationship was kindled. "We are just so happy and fortunate to have the zchut to have a family and a happy home," Mrs. Levy concludes. "Who knew that that fall in my apartment would contribute so positively and greatly to my future?"

Mrs. Levy and her husband Michael are very dedicated members of their Woodmere community. When Hurricane Sandy devastated their neighborhood, an email was sent out to all the congregants of their shul stating that the Levys have power, and are able to host anyone who needs a place to stay for. On Shabbos, when Mrs. Levy cannot use her electric wheelchair, her husband Michael pushes

her to shul, with Mrs. Levy guiding him. All the children know to stop and say “Good Shabbos” when they pass her on the street. Her house is always filled with high-school and college kids who help her with cooking, cleaning, and anything else she may need (at the end of my interview, she asked me to warm up a plate of food for her from the fridge and cut it into small pieces so she wouldn’t have

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to ask her son to miss part of the football game). In her community, she is not just the lady in the wheelchair. She is the one who attends every event, the first to invite new families over for a meal, and the one who teenagers know to go to when they need help with a school assignment.

The last question Mrs. Levy answered was why she is willing to share her entire life story with the public. She answered that besides for her desire to share the way that she sees Hashem’s hand so actively involved in her life, it is mostly to convey that a person’s instinctive reaction about a disability can be off base. “I want to communicate to the public that individuals with a disability are far more hurt by the stigma society places on them than by their disability itself. To be left out because of a disability is the tragedy, not the disability itself.”

My Old Friend

By Avigayil Karasick

Walking down 89th Street, I see the usual Friday afternoon city scene: trucks double-parked, doing their daily deliveries; dog walkers chasing after their leashes; people of all colors and creeds wrapped up in their own personal worlds. I, too, find myself absorbed in my thoughts as I make my way to my weekly visit with Mrs. Clara Horowitz, one of the most fascinating women I have ever met.

She grew up in communist Russia in the early 1900's. One distinct memory, which she often shares with me, is the tragic death of her father. Her father was a Rabbi in a small town before he was murdered by the Russians during a pogrom. The reality of this story is deeply etched in Mrs. Horowitz's memory because she was sitting on her father's lap, a child of seven, when he was killed. This is a story that I often hear because of the sorrow and trauma that still haunts her to this day.

Several years after this pivotal event, Mrs. Horowitz moved to what was formerly Palestine and attended the University in Beirut, Lebanon. This sheltered girl from a small town in Russia attended university in Beirut, one of the most cultured and cosmopolitan cities of the world during that era. It was in Beirut that she became exposed to the wider world and Middle Eastern society of the 1900's.

Most details from this time period in her life are hidden from me—is it because she doesn't remember very much from over 80 years ago? Or could it be because these treasured memories are for her and her alone? The adjustment to the radical change in climate from the bitter cold of Russia to the sweltering heat of the deserts of Palestine and Beirut was probably very difficult for her, not to mention the drastic cultural change and language challenge. I can hardly imagine. When Mrs. Horowitz finally emigrated to America, she studied nursing and became the head nurse at Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital, where she served for the next 47 years. What must that have been like? As I stroll into the building, these are the thoughts that are flooding my head. I have a strong desire to ask her about those years, but I feel that it is not my place to ask.

I walk into the elevator and press floor number five, then quickly glance in the mirror to make sure I look presentable for this 99-year-old widow. I knock on the door. The Russian aide greets me with the warm smile that I get every week when I come to visit. Mrs. Horowitz trudges to the door, cane in hand. Her hair is silver and white, like snow shining in the sunlight, and her face emanates warmth and excitement as she greets her guest who is 83 years younger than she is. The house looks the same as last week. A long, dark hallway leads to the same table covered in the same white tablecloth, at which we always sit. A lamp, a magnifying glass, a pad of paper and a pen, and a black pocket book are placed neatly on

the table. On one wall hangs a black and white photograph of what I assume to be her family, taken during her childhood in Russia. The opposite wall, behind Mrs. Horowitz's chair, is covered with pictures of children and grandchildren. In the small corner of the hallway sits a small table that holds important documents, research papers and articles from her nursing career. I have been privileged to see these, but forbidden to read them. They are Clara's secret, prized possessions.

After we embrace each other and I properly kiss both of her cheeks, we sit down and exchange some small talk about how she is feeling, how I am doing, and most importantly, how school is going. Clara reiterates the value of school

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and education and questions my plans for higher education and future career. After attending university and working as head nurse for over four decades, the importance of school and a career are ingrained in her heart and soul. I sit there marveling at how meaningful Clara Horowitz's message is to me, despite the enormous difference in age and culture that divides us. I listen and recognize the truth in what this elderly woman is telling me. When the conversation comes to a halt, I hand Mrs. Horowitz the flowers or kugel that I brought her for Shabbos.

As I hand her the small package, I see her face glow. A tear escapes her eye, and she thanks me profusely. I rise to leave and she struggles to her feet, in order to escort me to the door. Before we start our walk down the hallway together, Mrs. Horowitz puts her cane down and exclaims: "Look at me! You give me strength every week to continue." I blush and give a shy laugh, while thinking that maybe I really do make a difference with my visits. Although she is suffering from old age, a broken hip and vertigo, she still derives strength from a young girl coming by to say hello.

After every visit, I leave with a similar feeling. I realize that although there is a monumental gap between us, we somehow share a powerful connection. Our weekly visits confirm that the connection is becoming stronger and that the experience is not a burden, but rather a tremendous pleasure. Although I have many questions and there are many details about her life that remain unsatisfyingly vague, I very much enjoy these visits and I admire her greatly. Our relationship is strong and brightens up both the life of a 16-year-old girl, and a 99-year-old woman, and brings a long and tiring week to a lovely end.



Our First Lady

By Avigayil Fessel

Problem Student

By Ayelet Buchen

To My Former Teacher:

I never understood why you viewed me as a “problem student,” or why you regarded me with hatred burning in your eyes. My grades were better than other students’, and I did not misbehave during class. It was bad enough that I was mocked on my way to school for the color of my skin, but I expected you as a teacher to appreciate the goodness inside every child. I thought you would make school a haven for me, but you too were focused only on my appearance.

You saw the other children teasing me, throwing papers at me, and stealing my possessions. You turned a blind eye when they punched and slapped me, but when I tried to fight back you would scold me and send me to the principal. On the rare occasion that you would call on me during class, you would say my name in such a brutal way that I wished I hadn’t raised my hand. While you were teaching you would sneer in my direction. I can still visualize the way you narrowed your eyes and twitched your mouth in the cruelest way possible. I would come home each night and cry myself to sleep after complaining to my parents

that my life as an African American girl in the South could be filled with nothing but misery. Each morning I would dread leaving my house because I knew that from the moment I walked outside, white children would be waiting anxiously in the bushes to trip me, and when I got to school the scenario would not become any better. I wanted someone besides my parents to confide in, but there was no one willing to listen to the complaints of a black child, especially if that child was a girl. I could never stop myself from thinking that if you just listened to me for a few minutes, you would realize that being black didn’t make me any different from you. However, you would never listen to a word that came out of my mouth. When I asked you to tell a student to return my books to me, you looked at me with a treacherous glint in your eyes and yelled loud enough for the entire class to hear, “What did you do this time to frame the other children? Haven’t I already told you to stop provoking your classmates?” That was the last time I turned to you for help. By then, I understood that you, a mature adult, despised me as much as my classmates did.

Looking back now, I wonder how you would have treated me if you knew what was waiting in my future. Maybe you would have listened to every

word I had to say, knowing that someday millions of people would deliberately wait to hear me speak. Perhaps you would have treated me as you treated others if you knew what I was to become. You probably would have appreciated having me in your class if only you had realized how intelligent and insightful I was. It is possible that had you known I would become the third most important person in the United States of America, you would have thought, "How could anyone be so prejudiced towards such an amazing child?" Maybe you would have thought more of me if you knew that I would become the 66th Secretary of State and the first African American woman to hold this post.

Of course it did not even cross your mind that I might accomplish anything significant or meaningful. After all, who would have thought that a black girl who grew up in Alabama with racism and gender discrimination surrounding her could have any possibility of hope in her life? I am fortunate to have parents that had such strong beliefs in me at a time when no one else had any expectations from me. I do not hold you responsible for the way you treated me. I understand why you thought that I had no future. I just hope that I will be your example to show that all people are born as equals, whether they are black or white, male or female.

Your Forgiving Student,

Condoleezza Rice

The Strange Woman

Mindi Gelbtuch

She walks, she talks, and she eats. She lives in a simple home and does not lead a luxurious life. She functions like all the other humans I've encountered, except for a few strange differences. I wonder why she performs these queer actions, but I may never know, for I am no human.

Today, I see her come downstairs early in the morning. One by one, the other humans who dwell in the home come down, sometimes in late or early morning. She welcomes them with a "good morning," then asks if they need any assistance. The other humans proceed to eat breakfast and prepare for the day. She sits down on a comfortable couch, and from a nearby small wooden table she retrieves a leather book with strange letters written on the cover and binding. She opens the book and begins the first queer action of the day. She starts mouthing strange words in another language while reading the book. At the end, she stands and moves her body from side to side, forward and backward, until she stops, closes the book and returns it back to its original place. She then enters the kitchen, eats breakfast and digests many tri-colored and different sized tablets. Then all the humans, including the woman, exit the home in haste, leaving me all alone.

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The woman returns in the afternoon, with rolled-forward shoulders, half-open eyes, and a yawning mouth. She goes to the kitchen to cook up dinner for her and the other humans of the home. I hear a loud knock and then see the woman walking to the door, opening it to find some random male human standing there. They exchange a few words, and then I see her retrieve her bag, take money from it, and give it to the human. Why would someone give away their own wealth to another? Doesn't the woman require it for her own needs? This is the second strange act performed by the woman.

Later, the other humans return to the home. I see the woman pick up a device and extend an invitation to even more humans to come over for dinner. Why would someone do this if she is tired, weak, and doesn't have the money to spend on extra food? This is the third strange behavior the woman demonstrates. Soon after, all different types of humans arrive. They come to the home mostly on weekends for lunches or dinners. The woman serves them the meal, and they eat, converse, and smile. Afterwards, the strangers leave, with a friendly goodbye and an invitation for future meals from the lady. The rest of the night goes on with normalcy, and eventually all the humans go up to bed, leaving me alone again until the next morning. I don't know why the woman performs all these bizarre actions, but I may never know, for I am no human.

Lady Liberty

By Leah Manela

I stand here, tall and proud on my pedestal, my once-copper skin turned green from the rain and wind. I was presented to the United States of America by the French to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. I am supposed to represent liberty; I am supposed to be an icon of freedom, a welcoming signal to immigrants arriving from abroad. But that's not how I feel today.

A ship full of immigrants has just arrived from Europe. They come from a land of war and of suffering, a land where they were persecuted simply because of their religion. They are coming here, to America, to seek refuge in the land of

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freedom. They believe, as did the people who came before them, that the streets are paved with gold, that they will finally be free and happy here. They pass the island upon which I stand, the lush green grass waving lazily in the soft cool breeze, seemingly beckoning them forward. My torch that I hold aloft so proudly burns bright with the light of freedom, matched only by the joy reflected in the passengers' eyes. They scream and wave their caps; their long and arduous journey is finally complete.

But wait, what is happening? The ship is stalled offshore, the constant billowing of fumes creating a haze of fog that seems to dim my torch. What is the holdup? Why are they not being let in? Confusion washes over me: Why would the United States of America, the land that shines as a beacon of freedom to the entire world, not allow them safe passage ashore? I watch with a heavy heart as joyous American citizens wave their arms in warm welcome to relatives on the ship, and then as their smiles fade upon realizing the severity of the situation. Their expressions turn to ones of despair, hoping against all hope that this story will have a happy ending. The cries on the ship turn desperate; they don't want to go back to their old home, their previous life of misery and hatred.

The ship passes by my island again, but this time the passengers' eyes are no longer joyous and hopeful; they reflect dejection and hopelessness. They are being forced to take another difficult journey back to a life of genocides, torture and war. The country that was supposed to save them has failed them.

On days like this, I feel like my torch does not burn as brightly as it should. On days like this, my arm seems to ache from holding this torch of freedom aloft for so long.



The Young Idealist

By Esther Seryl Rotberg

Developmentally Remarkable

By Chaya Dembitzer

Peryl Dembitzer was born at a time when people with Down Syndrome were called “retarded” and hidden in closets. Her mother, my grandmother, Miriam Dembitzer, was just 22 years old and newly married when she gave birth to her firstborn, a girl with a scrunched up nose, flat face, and large tongue. Miriam was shocked. “It was unheard of in those days for young women to have Down Syndrome children; it only happened to the 45 year olds who were still having kids. I never saw it coming.”

The floor creaks as I enter my grandmother’s house. Yellowed pictures from the past decorate the cracking walls, and the faint musty smell of aging engulfs my nostrils. My grandmother sits on her peeling black leather recliner, its yellow foam cushioning bursting out of the seams, TV remote in one hand and her favorite James Patterson novel perched on her thigh. Her face bears the markers—stress lines and wrinkles—of worry and age. My grandmother prefers not to dwell on past hardships: “to retell is to relive and I’d rather keep it in the past,” she says. But with some gentle prodding I am able to get my grandmother to tell me the story of her eldest child, and her experiences as the mother of a child with Down Syndrome.

When Peryl was born, the medical staff didn’t say a word. It wasn’t that they didn’t want to be the bearers of bad news; they actually didn’t even know that the baby had Down Syndrome. Miriam, however, had been a teacher in elementary school and had a young student who suffered from Down Syndrome, so she was familiar with the genetic disorder. Immediately she sensed that something was wrong with her baby, but her pediatrician just laughed and told her she was being one of those “neurotic first mothers who think that one toenail out of place is a disease.” But my grandmother is not one to back off easily. She insisted on testing for her newborn, and the results confirmed her fears. Her daughter was diagnosed and labeled moderately retarded.

“My life had been torn from under my feet,” my grandmother recalls with a pained expression on her face. Her family didn’t have any genetic history of the disorder; still, she wondered if something was wrong with her: would the rest of her children have Down Syndrome, too? All these questions and more nagged at her conscience, tearing her apart at a time when she was already so vulnerable. Neither her family nor her husband’s family could offer much in the way of support—ignorance of the disorder was so prevalent and there were few resources in the Jewish community for dealing with Down Syndrome. And so Miriam and her husband Moshe were left to face their challenge alone. “I learned that I could only

rely on myself to deal with the situation and I would have to be self-sufficient”, my grandmother reminisces. In hindsight, her experiences raising a daughter with Down Syndrome with next to no support may have prepared my grandmother for her early widowhood, which left her to care for six young children on her own.

Even outside the Jewish community, there were few organizations and support groups for families of children with Down Syndrome and the prevailing attitude was one of shame. Many children with Down Syndrome rarely saw daylight. My grandmother was determined to help her daughter enjoy life, and she

After the trip, I got a new fuel inside of me to fight for the rights of my child.

turned to a Catholic Charities group that met at a Park Slope library for interactive play with dancing, coloring and singing for children with Down Syndrome. “Despite opposition from my family, I realized that it was more important to give my daughter the proper assistance she needed, even if it meant it was coming for a Christian outlet,” she says. My grandmother learned tolerance and through her exposure to people of diverse backgrounds, and was grate-

ful to the Christians who assisted her so much. Every day my grandmother and Peryl traveled to the program. Finally, Peryl would have friends that were like her, something to counteract the stares and scowls she typically received in the streets. Finally Peryl actually fit in somewhere.

When my grandmother got wind of an expert in Germany who supposedly performed cell therapy that could increase the intelligence levels of children with Down syndrome, she flew to Munich, where Peryl was subjected to a host of injections. But according to Miriam it turned out to be a “farce.” As my grandmother soon learned, “A shot can’t cure a genetic mutation. My daughter came and left the same child.” Later, they traveled to France to meet with the geneticist Jerome Lejeune, who had discovered that Down Syndrome was caused by a mutation in Chromosome 21. Lejeune really helped the Dembitzers understanding of the disease, and for years afterwards he’d visit and check in on Peryl’s progress. And thus, Peryl had a small part in the groundbreaking studies of the mutation.

“After the trip, I got a new fuel inside of me to fight for rights for my child,” Dembitzer says with a positive tone in her voice. She learned that her voice mattered and she began to advocate for children with Down Syndrome. Meeting with Lejeune, the Dembitzers had learned that Peryl fell in the trainable spectrum of

Down Syndrome children, which meant that she could be taught to perform basic functions such as going to the bathroom and feeding herself. But finding a suitable educational infrastructure for Peryl was extremely difficult.

Peryl's younger siblings accepted her for who she was; they didn't know anything different. "They accepted her as an equal, when most other people wouldn't." By the time Peryl turned 12, Jewish organizations serving people with Down Syndrome began to spring up. It was then that Miriam decided it was time to enlist the help of the Jewish organization called Mishkan, which assists with developmentally disabled Jewish children. "I realized that I had to accept outside assistance, even if it meant relinquishing some of my pride," she recalls with a glassy look in her eyes.

Peryl was beginning to deteriorate, becoming aggressive and more difficult to care for, when my grandmother was expecting her fifth child. Although it was a difficult and emotional decision, and her instinctive maternal love waged an internal war, my grandmother ultimately decided that proper care in an institution would be more beneficial than the compromised care she could offer at home while also caring for her other children. And so, at 12 years old, Peryl moved into a group home where she was able to form relationships with girls who were just like her, where she received individualized attention from her supervisors, and where she could benefit from a range of opportunities such as working a day job stuffing envelopes, which helped her feel like a productive member of society. The group home also offered medical care and therapy.

Twenty years later, Peryl is now a grown woman and she resides in the same residence, where she has attained a sort of celebrity status and is famous for her quick wit. She's finally appreciated for who she is as a person, not as a moderately retarded woman with Down Syndrome. Miriam and Peryl are lucky if they manage to see each other about once a month, hardly an ideal mother-daughter relationship. The ramifications have taken their toll on my grandmother, who often seems lost in thought, perhaps regretting her decision, perhaps wishing for the company of her eldest daughter now that she herself is on her own.

With the shift in attitudes surrounding Down Syndrome, society now tends to celebrate mothers who keep their developmentally challenged children at home. But as my grandmother's experience demonstrates, each case is unique and sometimes it can take just as much courage to recognize when the best care for the child cannot be provided at home. Ultimately what is in the best interest of the child is what matters most.

To Pay for Apple Juice and Yogurt

By Gabriella Englander

C'mon mister, just ring bim up already. The cashier was taking an eternity to finish ringing up the bald-headed man in front of me. How long could it take to drag a bottle of Coke, an umbrella, a bag of Doritos, and a pack of Must gum across the sensor? Every time the items were dragged in front of the device, the sensor screeched in protest and made a whirring, groaning sound. The cashier clacked her chewing gum, scratched her acne-afflicted chin, and dragged the gum across the sensor yet again.

I peered nervously behind me through the storefront. *Uh oh. Did the bus leave yet?* No, thank goodness. However, the bus driver was drumming his fingers on the dashboard and shooting nasty looks at me through the furiously waving windshield wipers.

I felt a tap on my shoulder.

“Excuse me? So sorry, miss, really. But do you mind if I slip in front of you?”

I turned to face a flushed, attractive woman in her mid-twenties who was nervously tucking a lock of auburn hair behind her ear. She was bundled up in a hunter green pea coat, burgundy silk scarf and black fur boots.

She pointed to the strawberry banana drink in her hand. “I only have this drink to pay for, and I’m in such a hurry. It would mean the world to me if I could go before you.”

I stared at her blankly. Didn’t she see how much of a rush I was in? Didn’t she notice my obvious impatient gestures – how I was crossing my arms and tapping my right leg on the floor, all the while rolling my eyes and grumbling under my breath? I didn’t breathe a word to her, not a single one, even though I felt a stampede of chastising remarks gallop up my throat and ram into my sealed lips. The bus would gladly leave without me, that I knew, if I didn’t zoom out of here in a matter of seconds. I’d be stranded in the middle of the highway, at a random Shell gas station, in the early April rain.

This woman stared at me and her green eyes pleaded silently: say yes, say yes. I sighed and jerked my head impatiently. “Fine. Go ahead.” She gladly obliged.

Great. Now I’ve done it. I could just imagine the bus driver’s reaction when I would trudge on to the bus, soaking wet, and late.

“Thank you so much dear -- you don’t understand what good you just did for me.”

Ughh. I hate it when people called me dear, especially when it’s coming

from someone who's only a few years older than me.

She slipped in front of me, and the gum-cracking cashier rang her up without a sensory issue. While the receipt was printing, the woman glanced at me, and then scribbled something onto a blank card. She leaned over the counter, placed the card in the cashier's hand and whispered into her ear. The cashier raised one eyebrow quizzically, but nodded. The woman turned up the collar of her pea coat, slipped on a pair of black leather gloves, and walked hurriedly out of the store, the glass door swinging behind her.

I shivered.

I watched as she walked at a brisk pace through the rain, towards a light blue Lexus. My eyes drifted from her car to the left, towards a big, white Coach bus. The bus driver caught my eye and made a very rude gesture at me. I slammed my raspberry yogurt and bottle of apple juice down on the counter. The cashier said nothing, just clacked her chewing gum and began to ring me up.

I was rummaging through my wallet, fishing for a ten dollar bill, when the cashier said, "You don't need to search for no cash. Someone already paid for ya, honey."

Excuse me!?

"Who?"

"The very nice missus in front of ya."

I inhaled sharply, thanked her, and turned to leave, my apple juice and yogurt in hand.

"Hold ya horses, sweet pea."

I raised an eyebrow.

"Here." She shoved a card into my hand. "The missus asked me to give ya this."

I glanced at the card and gasped at the fifty dollar bill taped to the back. I hastily turned to leave, the bus driver's rude gestures fading from my mind.

"Wait, sweet pea. Don't ya want a bag?"

I jammed the key in the ignition. *Come on. Turn on...turn on. For Mom's sake, turn ON!*

VRRMMHHH! I sank back in utter relief and threw the car in reverse. I must not have been paying attention to my left side mirror, because the big, white Coach bus, which was parked to my left, honked its horn...very loudly. As I pulled out of the parking spot, I saw her dash out of the gas station. *Gosh, I hope I didn't make her late.* I wondered if she received my card; it was the least I could do.

The tears flowed
freely as she
spoke those
words because I
knew then that
they would be
her last.

Twenty minutes later, I pulled into the Johns Hopkins Hospital parking lot. Bustling out of the car, I grabbed the strawberry banana drink from the back seat and entered the building. I made my way to the fourth floor and stopped by the floor's front desk.

"Hey, Jill. How is she?"

Jill peered up through her speckled glasses from the medical form she was reviewing. Her eyes widened at the sight of me. "You'd better get in there, Mrs. Ganders. She's not doing well."

I thanked her, made my way down the hall to room 407 and pushed open the familiar beige door.

"Hey, Mom." Tears threatened to spill over from my eyes as I saw her frail lump of flesh shiver on the white bed. "I brought it, mom. The drink you asked for. Your favorite, remember? Strawberry and banana."

Mom's labored breathing intensified as she struggled to turn her head in my direction. "Tha...thank you. This means s...o much to me. Her gaze slowly trickled from me to the wall in front of her, as she gasped once. "*You...mean so much to me.*"

The dams in my eyes broke. The tears flowed freely as she spoke those words because I knew then that they would be her last. And I was there to hear them.

Because of her.

A Match and an Eternal Flame

By Sarah Farber

Swoosh! Like a wispy dandelion seedling blown aloft by the wind, I drift aimlessly through the enveloping blackness of the night sky as the bee-like buzz of airplane engines recedes into the distance. Gazing heavenward beyond the soft outlines of my billowing parachute, I see millions of shiny, twinkling specks of light piercing through the darkness. My people are compared to the stars, but their precious glow is being cruelly snuffed out by dark and evil forces. I wish I could stay up here forever and never touch the earth where so much pain, suffering and hardship exist. But even as the stars beckon, I know I must plant my feet on the ground where I must fight for my nation. My parachute forms a canopy above me, and I can only wonder if this will be the final canopy for me, wedding me forever to my people's destiny.

Thump! I have landed, only to find out that we are too late. The Nazis have already invaded Hungary. Why did I risk my life and jump out of an airplane only to discover that my efforts were pointless? Maybe my brother was right when he told me this is "no job for a girl!" What am I supposed to do now? Should I carry on and fight, or should I run away and pretend that all is okay? What was that noise? Oh no! They have come for us! I must run.

Slam! I am trapped in a prison cell, isolated from the world, unable to fight. I have endured much torture, but I tell myself that my pain is nothing compared to that of my brothers and sisters. I sit here waiting and wondering what is to become of me. And then I remember my mission, and suddenly everything becomes clear to me. I came to fight and to prove that the Jewish nation will not die. We will prevail and remain ever-strong, an everlasting people. The power of our goodness and light will always overcome the evil and darkness.

Creak... The prison guards have come. They are taking me somewhere. I feel I know what my fate shall be. If I am executed, at least I know what I have done was not in vain. I know that even though I was unable to carry out my mission, others will follow my example and succeed.

Flash! I see daylight ahead and a clear blue sky, maybe the last I shall ever know. But even as my candle grows dim, I know it will kindle a fire in the hearts of those who will follow.

*"Blessed is the match consumed in kindling a flame.
Blessed is the flame that burns in the secret fastness of the heart.
Blessed is the heart with strength to stop its beating for honor's sake.
Blessed is the match consumed in kindling a flame." — Chana Senesh*



The Queen's Stamp

By Shana Goldhar

The Loudness of Silence

By Michal Cohen

I don't understand. Why do they whisper, point, motion? Lockers slam, students run, class is about to begin. Yet they stare. Wherever I go, attention seems to follow me. Hey, I'm the new kid; I get it. I've been in four schools in two years. I suppose that at this point, I should be used to it. Yet I still feel like I'm about to throw up my breakfast muffin and chocolate milk. I gather my courage and turn the classroom doorknob.

Just like that, 24 heads turn and stare. The all-too-familiar stomach butterflies return like old friends. I take my seat and look around. I observe my new classmates. Predictable as an equation, the "Mathletes" sit in the front of the room, pounding away at their calculators, arguing over the solution to a word problem. I take a seat next to them, where it's safe. It is the furthest distance from the "Amandas."

Amanda is what I call any girl who sits in the back, texts during class, and has "the look." You know, her hair is perfectly blown, her lip-gloss applied every hour on the hour. So whether her parents named her Brittany, Sarah, Hillary or Megan, they are all Amandas. For some reason Amandas and I don't seem to get along. I never did anything wrong, as far as I'm concerned. I've tried to figure it out, to truly understand it, but I never did, so I keep my distance and sit in the front.

The bell rings, and Blonde Amanda stands up and whispers into the ear of Brunette Amanda. I stretch my neck, trying to make out what she's saying but it's hard because she's talking so fast. "Pretty" she mouths and nods towards me. Surprisingly they all turn to stare. At me.

NOW I understand!

They are staring in awe. Their whispers echo admiration. They like me, they truly like me.

I am pretty.

At first I thought it couldn't possibly be, but that's what she said! No denying facts. I stare at my reflection in the locker mirror. I look at my brown curly hair and my hazel eyes in the mirror. They never struck me as unique until now. I can't help but repeat the word over and over again.

P-R-E-T-T-Y. Six letters help me finally understand.

I walk around, twirling and dancing and singing. Everybody stares, but the staring no longer bothers me. I don't care because now I finally understand why. The Amandas aren't so bad after all. To think, here I was judging Brittany, Sarah,

Hillary or Megan so unfairly.

I walk back into the classroom, smiling so wide my lips hurt. Dare I dream? Could I also be an Amanda? With “pretty” on my mind, I make a decision. I detour on my way home from school today. Destination: Rocking Valley Mall.

I grab a scarf at one kiosk. It goes so well with my green eyes. At another kiosk, I slow down for a manicure. Pretty nails to match a pretty face.

I veer toward the Mac counter at Bloomingdales.

“I want the latest in makeup, please.”

The startled makeup artist nods towards the young girl in the chair having her colors customized to match her skin tone. I freeze. It’s an Amanda, THE Amanda from class. The one who clearly knows beauty when she sees it. After all, she classified me as such.

What’s this?

P-R-E-T-T-Y.
Six letters
help me finally
understand.

Why are her eyebrows arching? That frown confuses me. Another Amanda sidles up to her and also looks in my direction. Clearly I am a popular topic of conversation today. I imagine their exchange. Will they admire my style? My grace? My newly manicured nails? I concentrate hard as Amanda One turns to Amanda Two.

“Pity,” she mouths. I read her lips. Again, she turns and motions towards me. “Pity.”

The sound of her voice can never reach my ears. But her message screams loudly.

I may be deaf to the world, but not to cruelty.

Suddenly, I’m glad I can’t hear. But I wish I didn’t understand.

The Unforgivable Crime

By Fraedyl Goldberg

On October 10, 2012, Malala Yousafzai was rushed to an emergency room in Peshawar for a gunshot wound to the head. Her age? 14. Her crime? Wanting an education. This is what she experienced when she finally woke up, momentarily safe, in a hospital in England.

I wake up to a searing headache and a mob of doctors leaning over me. These men make me uncomfortable, so in a faint, raspy voice I ask if there are any women doctors. They choose to ignore me and instead tell me I should rest because I just had major surgery. A decompressive craniectomy, to be specific. Last year, when I had that medical obsession, I memorized terms like that, so I remember that a decompressive craniectomy is when part of the skull is removed to allow room for the brain to swell. Since my abba, Ziauddin, told me that my calling is politics, I haven't been as interested in becoming a doctor so now I just have all these useless medical terms taking up room in my head.

The doctors keep saying how lucky I am to be alive; a shot in the head is usually fatal. But I say, what good is being alive in a country that doesn't let you lead your own life? Isn't that a paradox? I've been receiving thousands of letters over the course of my stay here at Queen Elisabeth Hospital in Birmingham, England. "You're so brave, Malala", "You're my role model, Malala." But why am I considered any more heroic than any of the girls who have continued to show up at school every day, despite the threats of the Taliban? Those self-righteous animals think they are better than everyone else and that they can tell everyone what to do because they are following "G-d's order." But no one who believes in G-d would treat other people like that. The whole thing is just so backwards, it makes my head hurt even more.

The doctors say that it's normal if I don't remember what happened prior to and during the attack. I wish that was the case. I remember every, single, haunting detail. In fact, I remember it so well that I'm considering holding a press conference to talk about it. I'm not going to let the Taliban stop me. If I give up now, all of my dedication and work will have been in vain. And aside from that, what is going to happen to all of us girls in Pakistan? The Taliban believe that the only purpose for women is to be used as factories for producing sons, and I need to prove them all wrong. Women should have the same right to an education as men do. I don't care how many times I'm threatened or shot at. Until the day I die, I won't stop advocating for it.

Sitting in bed all day has given me plenty of time to think about everything. I know that things are starting to look pretty desperate for Pakistani women, but

what's to say it won't get better? Maybe by the time I have children of my own, some knight in shining armor will have overthrown the Taliban. Or perhaps if I continue speaking out, the Taliban will have no choice but to repeal this crazy law against women's education. I'm going to remain strong because so many girls are looking up to me, watching how I react to this shooting. And what kind of example will I be for them if I just back down and blend back into the colorless population of Pakistani women?

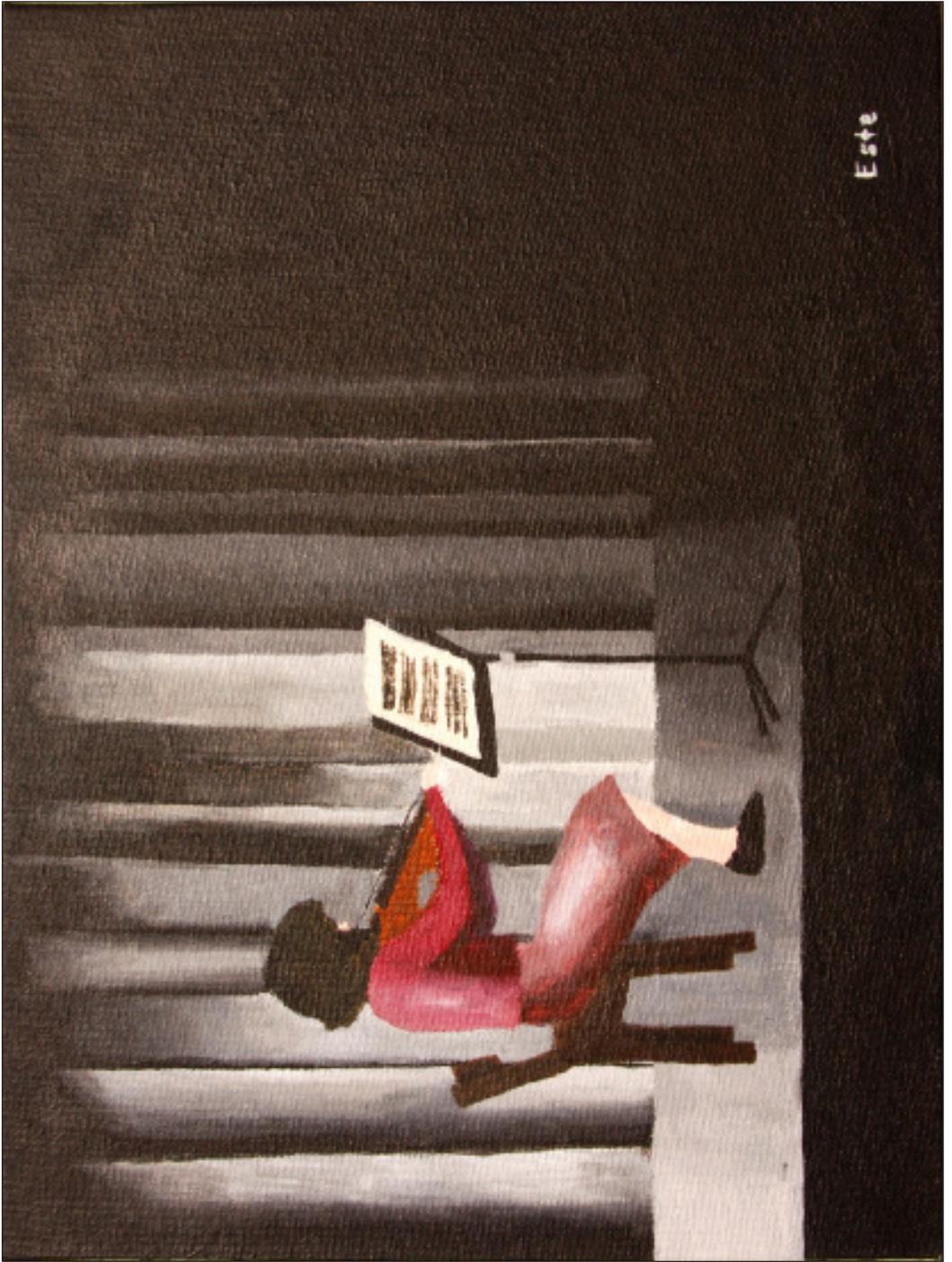
I don't care how many times I'm threatened or shot at. Until the day I die, I won't stop advocating for it.

I still have hope for my country, and I pray for it each day. This morning, after a particularly long prayer, I decide to ask Abba to buy me a newspaper because it's been a long time since I've read anything and the doctors say my brain is now strong enough to focus on the small letters. I've always loved the feel of a newspaper in my hands and the crinkling sound it makes when I turn the pages. While most of my friends had fairytales like Prince Saiful Malook and Badri Jamala read to them at bedtime, Abba would take out the day's newspaper and read me an article he had found interesting. This is how I came to love news and politics.

I guess I must have dozed off for a few minutes because as I wake up I hear sturdy footsteps that must be Abba's coming towards my room. Sure enough, he appears, holding a newspaper for me. I start from the cover page and take in every word greedily, like a little girl who hasn't had candy in a long time and doesn't want to leave behind a single crumb. Page one has a long article about a new act the English Prime Minister just signed, and the second page is all about some sports event. On page three, I notice my name in the header of an article. I wonder silently what this could be about. Two minutes into the article, I let out a loud shriek and almost faint. The doctors and my father come running into my room, shouting, "What happened? What's going on?" but all I can do is point to the sentence I just read, the 16 simple words that have changed my life in an instant.

"Earlier this week, a fatwa* was issued on Malala Yousufzai for turning her back on Islam."

*A non-binding judgment on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized religious authority to ordain the killing of a traitor.



My Mother's Symphony

By Estee Stollman

Definreft Wrold

By Rivky Szczupakiewicz

“When I was younger I didn’t really understand what my problem was,” Leah confided in me. Teachers always wrote her off as “dumb,” and she was always behind in class. During her preschool years, Leah’s teachers assumed she was a weak student, and they didn’t expect much from her; they rarely discussed any issues with her parents. Leah’s desk in the classroom was always placed right in front of the teacher’s, when the back row was the most coveted. In the first grade, Leah was constantly called on to read in front of the class. Leah’s face got as red as her hair when she told me that her class had to wait while she stumbled over the simplest of words. I knew that they made fun of her for it, too. “I was considered ‘special’ just because I couldn’t read,” she said, looking down.

Towards the end of first grade, Leah’s teacher called in her parents for a meeting. Her teacher suggested Leah go to a school for children with developmental disabilities, and she referred to her many framed degrees on her wall for reference. She insisted that Leah get evaluated by the Board of Education. Leah scored well above average on her IQ test, but was enrolled in a special education class at the local public school for children who couldn’t read. The lessons were focused on reading and were taught in small class setting at a slow pace.

I was getting help, but none of it was helping.

Although Leah always insisted that she was “the smartest kid in her class,” no one ever believed her. When Leah’s reading did not improve, and the Board of Education did not know how to help anymore, her parents brought her to her pediatrician to rule out any medical issues. She got both her hearing and her vision tested. Although she received glasses for astigmatism, it was clear that it wasn’t the cause of her trouble in school. “But (my glasses) did help to improve my self-esteem. I felt like a professor,” Leah said.

Leah also received an FM system microphone so that she could hear the teachers’ words directly in her ear in order to help her pay attention. However, Leah’s teachers refused to wear the microphone, so the system hardly helped. Leah already stuck out in school with her red hair and reading issues, and having to wear a headset gave another reason for children to make fun of her.

“I was getting help, but none of it was helping,” she said. Leah’s pediatrician eventually recommended that she get evaluated by Doctor Helene Ribowsky, a specialist in the diagnosis and remediation of learning disabilities. Leah’s parents

immediately scheduled an appointment with Dr. Ribowsky, but it took months to get her initial evaluation and weeks after that for the initial meeting. By the time she was diagnosed with dyslexia, and she began weekly sessions with Dr. Ribowsky, she was already in the middle of the second grade. Even though she missed morning classes in Hebrew, her reading began to improve tremendously. “Dr. Ribowsky was my Morah Henya; I loved that she understood me,” Leah said quietly.

She worked hard using a method that worked; she used to “zap” away her problems caused by “Mr. Quick.” She started feeling better about herself, and she learned that her problems were not her own fault. “I realized that all my problems could be conquered with time,” Leah told me with a small smile.

Leah did many sheets of work at home, and she read a countless number of children’s books from Dr. Ribowsky’s private library. As she got older and more advanced in her reading and writing skills, she began to read more challenging chapter books. She became more excited about raising her hand in class, and she was no longer the quiet, reserved, “weird” kid. Leah had finally received the help she needed.

When Leah finished the fourth grade, she stopped going to Dr. Ribowsky – her reading level was higher than any other child’s in her class. Although she was still behind in Hebrew, it didn’t bother her so much. Leah met with an occupational therapist daily, someone her mother called a “blessing from Hashem because she worked with Leah’s needs, and she accomplished the task of getting her ready for high school.” In time, Leah’s teachers learned to see her for who she really is, a smart girl with a small issue. Every once in awhile, Leah’s parents sent one of her exceptional report cards to Dr. Ribowsky to show off her accomplishments.

Now that she is in the eleventh grade she is still behind in some subjects, especially the Hebrew ones because she missed so much class during elementary school. Her school gives her extra resource classes, even though she doesn’t believe that she needs them because, intellectually and verbally, she is above average.

Sometimes when teachers hear about her dyslexia, they expect much less of her, and they don’t always call on her in class. “Teachers don’t know that I understand,” she said with frustration. Some people still consider her the odd girl with red hair and glasses, but she doesn’t mind that anymore. If she pays attention in class without writing notes, it’s much more effective for her learning process. Leah has her own method for writing notes, which sometimes gets her into trouble –

she draws pictures of what is being taught. Leah has learned to work around her dyslexia, and she has become an avid reader. She goes to the library every week and reads more than most average people do.

Some people
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Leah is one of the strongest people that I have ever met, and I admire her tremendously. As a child she was always the first to make friends on the playground, and this friendliness matured into her genuine love for all people. She looks beyond a person's flaws. I have never heard Leah say one negative word about the teachers who looked down on her or the students who ridiculed her. She has always found an escape in drawing and listening to music, usually at the same time. Since she is used to being different she is okay with thinking outside of the box and doing things that other people might consider weird. She wants to be a writer, but not just any writer: she wants to become a comic book writer. Leah always loved to draw, and comic books were the best books for her to read when she was having trouble. Leah may be different, but I love her for it.

"The world may look differently to me than how it looks to other people, but I grew up this way," Leah said. "My world is normal to me."

My House

By Talya Horenstein

She shoves Alyssa against the off-white wall and then storms off.

“Ungrateful child,” I hear her mutter.

I slide on my sneakers and black hoodie and slip out the back door. I walk past the perfect white stucco houses, entrances lit up as dusk settles, past the lush green lawns and picket fences and apple trees, to the grimy shops and littered alleyways.

I find my niche and sit on the dusty ground. I have a good view of the deserted parking lot behind the old Pathmark that went out of business two months ago. The sky’s remaining light is steadily sucked away. Eventually a familiar group of guys come around, laughing raucously. The one I call Mohawk is the alpha of the pack - he’s the large hulking one with the greasy black mohawk and an expansive knowledge of curse words even I’ve never heard before; Holy Metal is the bony blonde with a face pieced with so much metal I can barely see a patch of skin; Snake Scalp has a shiny shaved head embellished with thick green and black tattoos of intertwined snakes and skulls that creep down his neck. They all wear dark baggy jeans and bulky leather jackets. Once or twice I thought I saw the sharp glint of a knife in one of their jacket pockets, but it was hard to tell with the ever-present thick aura of smoke surrounding them. They think they’re so cool.

Their routine lulls me to sleep in my little crevice between the back of a sooty brick apartment building and a dark green Dumpster. I awaken to a foot jabbing painfully into my side. A guy, early twenties perhaps, with breath reeking of stale beer looms over me.

“Heyyyoou. Whatchoo doinnn heeer?” The words stumble awkwardly out of his mouth. He raises a foot to kick me again, but I grab it and twist his leg hard and shove him away. He stares at me balefully before staggering off.

Eyes falling to my watch, I rise and wipe my hands on my jeans, leaving dusty streaks. I walk home quickly, turning on my street as the sun begins to stretch above the horizon, as though remembering forgotten obligations. I open the door to Linda’s house – my house, I mentally correct myself – with excruciating slowness so the hinges don’t squeal. I tread lightly up the stairs when I hear it: expectant tapping and a throat clearing. I grit my teeth then turn around, grinding out a smile.

“Aunt Linda. You’re up early.”

She doesn’t smile, just stares coldly at me before slapping my cheek, which stings like fresh frostbite. A vein pulses by her left temple.

"You'd better have a good explanation, Sarah." I can hear the hot fury beneath her perfectly even tone. When I don't reply, she slaps me again for good measure before walking to the kitchen to make breakfast.

After school, Alyssa and I walk home slowly from the corner bus stop, making the most of the sunshine. One inside we split off; she heads to the kitchen to do chores, and I firmly plug my earbuds in, relaxing to the sound of guitars thrashing

and drums pounding, and head upstairs to do homework. I become engrossed in my essay on the causes of the Civil War. After writing the last sentence, I pull out my blaring earbuds, stretch my back, and crack my knuckles, a habit Linda despises. I hear the evening birds chirping and the gravel grinding as Linda's silver Camry pulls into the driveway. I groan and rummage through my drawer for aspirin with one hand, securing my earbuds to their place with the other.

I twist my head out
the door to see Alyssa
crumpled at the foot
of the stairwell as
Linda's heels clack
away like pistol shots.

I pull the right earbud out at the familiar sound of shouting. I don't know what set her off this time. She's yelling at Alyssa again, probably about something that wasn't even her fault. There is a low banging and a thud. I twist my head out the door to see Alyssa crumpled at the foot of the stairwell as Linda's heels clack away like pistol shots. When they fade down the hall and Linda's study door clicks shut, I tear down the stairs three at a time and take stock of the damage: twisted ankle, bruises around the left shoulder, a gash on the chin and a slight line of blood trailing from her nose. Alyssa wipes it away and stands up shakily, pushing away the arm I extended.

"Go away. I'm fine," she says sharply.

"Come on, Alyssa, that's not normal. You could have gotten really hurt." I glance up at the stairs and back at her.

Alyssa clenches her jaw and her eyes flash. "Just because your mom didn't want you doesn't give you the right to judge mine."

I step back, eyes wide, turn around and head straight back up the stairs, shutting my door firmly. I lean against it for a second, eyes closed, before slowly

making my way to my bed. It's dark outside, and most of the stars aren't visible through the veil of clouds.

A few minutes later, I hear a knock, and Alyssa walks in.

"I'm sorry," she says stiffly. "I shouldn't have said that."

I shrug, not meeting her eyes. She sighs then joins me on the bed.

"It's just that... you don't understand." She stares at her fingernails. "I made her angry. She was just upset at me. It was my fault; I shouldn't have gotten her mad." I shake my head silently.

That was the night I left. I just grabbed my iPod and hoodie and walked out the front door. I didn't take care to be quiet; I let the door slam in my wake.

I think about that day a lot and the house I left behind. Things are different now. I live with a nice lady, Matu, in an apartment close enough to the hospital so I can visit my dad. I don't know if he can hear me or not somewhere deep inside his cocoon, so I don't talk about Linda. I would be sad if I had a sister like that, so I just talk about my new school if I say anything at all.

One night, I go back, just to peek in on Alyssa. She wouldn't come with me when I left, insisted that what happened was her own fault and there was no reason to leave, that I was being stupid and selfish. But she is still my cousin. I see her through the gauzy white curtains. Linda stands over Alyssa's hunched form. Her fist swings back, reconnecting with Alyssa's jaw, all while Alyssa's quivering lips form the same words over and over: "It was my fault. I'm sorry. It was all my fault."

I walk away slowly, past the perfect white houses with the white fences and lush lawns and the apple trees, into the real world of soot and grime and inky blackness.



At the Kotel

By Yael Cohen, Grade 11

Take 1... Take 2... Take 3...Take 613

By Chaya Sarah Shippel

The terms “Chassidic woman” and “Hollywood film producer” seemingly represent two completely different worlds. This is not so in the fascinating life of Rama Burshtein.

Rama Burshtein was born in 1967 in New York City. As a young child, her parents made Aliyah and moved to Israel where she spent her formative years growing up in Tel Aviv. Upon graduation from high school, she pursued her dream of movie-making and attended the Sam Spiegel Film and Television School in Jerusalem. At 27 years old, after graduating film school and becoming immersed in the cinematic world, she realized that there must be more to life than the make-believe world of Hollywood, and she became interested in learning about her Jewish heritage.

Her journey led her to learn more and more about religious observance. As she studied and prayed, her goal became to build a family and a home that modeled the completely committed Jewish homes she had become acquainted with. Rama was and is an individual who sought the truth with great passion and would not rest until she had attained the answers and knowledge she needed to live a balanced Torah life.

As a newly observant Jew with the skills of movie producing and directing, she wished to utilize her talents in a proper way. Although the world of film is generally not a profession for religious Jews, and even more so not a place for a religious woman, Rama had a burning desire to use her skills for the sake of Heaven. She struggled to accept that becoming religious would mean that she would have to forfeit the years of study and expertise in film that she had attained. Therefore, she consulted with her mentoring Rabbi who encouraged her to devote herself to promoting film as a tool for self-expression in the Orthodox Jewish community for women only. She spent many years directing and producing successful films for religious Jewish women. She taught, directed and produced films at many Israeli schools, such as Ma’ale Film School, Yad Benjamin Film School for Woman and the Ulpana Arts School in Jerusalem.

Three years ago, her father and mother passed away in the same week. During this week of mourning, Rama realized how short life is and how we must use the unique talents G-d has given us to live life to its fullest and to accomplish our purpose in this world. One night as she lied in bed, she realized that the vast portrayal of traditional Jewish life on the movie screen was being produced by outsiders looking in at the observant community. So often, films portrayed an inaccurate expression of Orthodox life, and few if any captured the true beauty of religious

in Hollywood

living. She dreamed of directing a movie that would present to the secular world the beauty and the ethical values of Orthodox Jews from the inside out. This was a task and a role she felt she was uniquely qualified to accomplish; however, she knew that the challenge would be enormous: Where would the funding come from? Who would be the actors be? And (even more challenging): Would her Rabbi allow her, an ultra-Orthodox mother of Rabbinical students, to venture into the glittery world of film production?

Would her Rabbi
allow her...to
venture into the
glittery world of
film production?

She discussed it with her Rabbi, and he immediately saw her passionate desire to teach the world about traditional Judaism through the medium of film. Recognizing Rama as a true, G-d fearing individual, he permitted her to pursue this dream, specifically with the goal of educating the secular world about Jewish values. And so, with her Rabbi's approval, Rama began the process of actualizing her dream.

In 2012, Rama's first feature film, *Fill the Void*, was released. During the filming and editing process, as she traveled from from studio to studio, Rama maintained her Orthodox guidelines and drew the respect of all she came into contact with. She wouldn't shake men's hands, nor would she dress immodestly. Months and months of hard work transpired, and finally the film made its way from the cutting room floor all the way to the big screen at Lincoln Center, where it debuted at the New York Film Festival.

This October, Rama traveled to New York for the world premiere of her film. My family had the privilege to host her for Shabbos, during which time she shared her fascinating story with all of us. She confided that she didn't like the flashing lights of the paparazzi in her eyes and how she was not used to this "movie producer" lifestyle. Up until her film premiere, Rama hadn't been exposed to secular society for a long period of time, yet here she was, walking down red carpets and giving interviews. While she could in no way prepare for this level of press and fame, she has managed to maintain her levels of modesty throughout this entire process and take great pride in portraying to the world what she believes and what she stands for. I admire her extreme devotion to Judaism and all she has taught me about the importance of clinging to one's personal standards and beliefs, no matter the risk.

A Counting Game

By Chayala Friedman

And then there was this big crash like a jillion jars of peanut butter and onion soup that tastes like grease came falling outta nowhere into the aisle. And that's when I lost count. I hate when that happens. I think I was up to 65,383. Or maybe 70,000. I forget. I count all the time. All day and sometimes all night when the rocking in my head won't settle and I can't get any sleep. 1,2,3,4,5...I count to calm myself. And to focus. That's what these new-time doctors tell me. That counting'll help me concentrate. I have to remind myself what day it is. And that I'm living now, in the present, along with everyone else. It's hard to keep it all present tense when I'm so caught up in remembering. And sometimes they fight each other, the counting and the remembering. And it's hard to keep them apart.

6,7,8,9...man! I hate having to start over. I get this from my Mama. She used to tell me, "Gracey, there was never no point to starting over. Just work with what ya come up with so far and build somethin' off it." She was OK, ya know. We used to sit behind our trailer and she'd always let me draw flowers on her arm in the glaze of dying sun that came to us from the gate.

10,11,12,13,14...I'm walking down 14th Street now. The grocery was too crowded this time of day. It reminds me of the noisy restaurant where my Mama used to work. She was a waitress there from eight till twelve. I'd always sit by myself in the back room with the sign on it that read, "Employees Only." And while I sat with a can of Cherry Coke, just waiting for her to finish up, I counted. Waited and counted. Like I do now. Truth is, it lasted a lot longer than twelve—her shift, I mean. She'd stay another two hours sometimes. To earn the extra money, or maybe just to fool around. By then, I had usually fallen asleep against the coat rack where all the waitresses left their stuff before they went to work. One time, I stayed up the whole time. I counted and counted until it was finally over. The last number I got to before she took me home was 9,995.

Oh, it's starting to rain now. I'm counting faster. 27,28,29,30,33,37...I really hate the rain. It makes me so nervous. They tell me it's a "subconscious" fear I got. That it's all in my head or somethin'. But I don't believe 'em. I know why I hate the rain. Why I'm scared of it.

40,41,42,45,67,89...Oh man. Oh man. It's not working. My numbers are going too fast. I can't slow down. 93,99,110,150....

It rained the day they took my Mama away. Said something about how she couldn't raise me right. I heard her crying for me and screaming at them. Or maybe I was screaming. I heard her say, "But she loves me, she loves me!" over and over again. And I told them they were wrong, that I did love her. And I begged for them

to let me stay with her. But they went right on as if I wasn't there. And I stayed with my aunt till high school was over. Man, my aunt. She was always trying to talk and stuff. She always sat there on my bed and just waited for me, like maybe if she waited long enough I would do something, ya know? And that irritated me so bad. So this one time, I just stood up there on the bed and screamed at her real loud.

It rained the
day they took
my Mama
away.

I told her I hated her for just sitting there at the edge of my bed. And I told her I wanted to go back to my Mama in the trailer. And draw flowers and watch the old gate. And eat the TV dinners she'd bring home for us to make in the microwave, 'cause there was nothing else to eat. And the whole time, my aunt just sat there and let me scream. And she waited 'till I was all screamed out and said, "If you ever needa scream again, I'll help you." And then she left me

just lying there forever in my bed.

190,200,340,680,681,686...I can't, I can't! I hear Mama callin' me. She's tellin' me, "You can't start over. It's all a waste. All for nothing." 700,888,899,956...don't start over. I won't! I won't! I'm yelling at her. The rain is so heavy now. 957,978,979...the rain is pouring all over me. It'll drown me. I know it's gonna drown me . 985,992... don't start over. I'm comin', Mama. I'm not gonna start over. I'll do whatever you say— just come back! Maybe if I count enough, she'll come. Like she did after each of her shifts years ago. The rain is soaking through. It's making my arms freeze to my sides. My aunt is calling me now. She's telling me to let it out. I could scream. She's coaxing my anger. Stop it! Stop it! I hate you! I want to go home! Get up! Take me home! 995,999, 1000! The count isn't working. I'm falling. The voices are getting louder. They're yelling at me. Stop it! I wanna go home! "I'll always be there, and I'll always help you," she's saying. "Don't ever start over." It's pointless. Don't! Don't! I'm comin', Mama! I'm almost there. The rain, it's trying to separate us. Don't let them, Mama! Don't let them take you! Don't let them come! 1000, 100000000...one hundred milliona billion.... one trillion....

One trillion. There are one trillion voices racing through my head. I can't stop them anymore. So, instead, I just wait for the rocking and the shaking to stop. The rain is never ending and I hate it. I can't count anymore. What comes after one trillion? One hundred trillion? It doesn't ever stop. Like the rain. And like the voices. Who ever invented counting anyways? Those idiot doctors. I will have to start over again. 1,2,3,4,5...except I hate starting over. Oh, the rain. Oh man, the rain.

A Woman's Reflection

By Gabriella Englander



GABRIELLA ENGLANDER

Who's the Mother?

By Dena Skydell

Camilla walked into the dining room, her suede purse colliding with her satin-clad thigh. Her eyes darted from the elaborate chandelier dangling from the sixteen-foot ceiling to the large tray of freshly baked pastries on the table. She reached out for a pastry and saw that a pile of envelopes was hidden underneath the cream-filled tray.

She blew off the pastry powder messily strewn across the first envelope and opened it. A squeak escaped her freshly glossed lips and she dropped the first envelope to the floor, her eyes widening with horror. She quickly scanned the rest of the envelopes, and words like “warning”, “at risk”, “debt”, “\$100,000”, “evacuation”, “bills” and “lose your house” popped out at her.

“Mom?” Camilla’s voice rose as she rushed into the living room and saw her mother lounged comfortably on the couch, a pile of pastries at her feet. She held a pastry in each hand, and there was a ring of yellow custard circling her mouth.

“Hello,” her mother smiled pertly, waving her pastries in the air.

“Mom,” Camilla began shakily. “Did you get the mail today?” Her mother grinned and shook her head.

“Yum.” Camilla’s lips curled in disgust as her mother licked the custard off her fingers. Her mother had been diagnosed with premature dementia 17 years earlier, about three months before she’d given birth to Camilla, prompting her husband to leave them. “These pastries are good.”

“Anything interesting happen today?” Camilla asked her mother, clenching her fists tightly. Her mother ignored the question and took another bite out of her pastry.

“Stop it!” Camilla suddenly shrieked. “Just stop! Stop pretending everything’s okay! It’s not, and we both know it!” Her mother adjusted the maroon pillow supporting her back upright on the couch and cocked her head to the side.

“I like these pastries,” she murmured softly, her square-rimmed glasses slipping down her nose as she leaned over to examine the crumbs in her hands.

“Do you not see these?” Camilla shouted, “We’re at risk of losing our home! The home that I have to work to pay for! I’m the only 17-year-old that I know with a real job! Did you ever think that just maybe I hate having to work when I’m supposed to be studying for tests that I need to take in order to graduate high school? What do you even do all day, that’s what I’d really like to know! You always say you’re busy! With what? With what friends? With what job? Seriously,

just stop and take control of this whole situation, its ridiculous! Do you know how embarrassed I am when my friends ask about you? Do you think I like lying to them about you and pretending you're normal? I can't stand it and I'm just so tired of it. I don't want this anymore; I shouldn't have to have this stress in my life!"

Camilla shook the pile of bills roughly in her mother's face, "Did you know that you didn't come to my school play this year? Did you know I had the main part in the play? Everyone else's mothers were there, and I had the main role! Do you know how stupid I looked when you didn't show up? And how did you think I felt when you didn't show up to parent-teacher conferences this year, Mom? What did you think I was going to tell my teachers when they asked about you? Do you even care?" Her mother's eyes were downcast as she slowly reached for another pastry.

A smile tugged at her custard-coated lips as she watched the leaves form a big pile on the ground.

"No!" Camilla's voice was filled with pain and shrill with hurt. "Stop thinking about the stupid pastry for one minute and maybe listen to me for once! Actually, don't..." Camilla's voice wobbled, "Your pastries make you happy, and that's something I clearly haven't been able to do in the past seventeen years."

Camilla struggled to control her ragged breathing. Tears streamed down her flushed cheeks as she dashed out of the room. Her mother sat on the couch silently, holding the powdered pastry tightly in her fist. Her gaze wandered to the window and she watched as a swirl of coppery leaves danced in the auburn air. At a leisurely pace, the leaves all fell to the ground, accumulating together in a large pile on the street. A smile tugged at her custard-coated lips as she watched the leaves form a big pile on the ground. At that moment, a large gust of wind blew harshly at the pile, causing the leaves to scatter quickly and leave the ground bare.

Her throat constricted as she struggled to swallow past the lump that had just formed. She lifted the pastry to her lips, powder staining her cheeks as she wolfishly chewed the pastry. A tear escaped her watery eyes and dripped down her face, mingling with the mess of custard and powder covering her cheeks. The custard oozed out of her pastry and leaked onto her lips. She took another bite.

Sister of the 100-Year War Shero

By Elisheva Cohen

You probably all know me. Wait...do you really?

No, of course not. Who am I kidding? You don't know me. It's my sister you're thinking of. Yeah, she's the famous one, even though she lived for only nineteen years. She's the one who claimed she heard voices, you know, telling her to "Save France!"

Okay, I'll admit it. I thought she was a psycho. I mean, who claims to hear voices, let alone voices telling her to do something like that? At the time, I thought she was just doing it for attention because she was bored or something. I thought she wanted to do something cool, really cool. Well, that really cool thing ended her life.

Now you're probably thinking, "How could you say something like that? Your sister was amazing. You should be really proud."

Seriously? Getting yourself killed is "amazing"?!?

I just want her back. I want my big sister. She's gone and now I'm stuck with grieving parents, two brothers and a missing sister -- and I'm not talking about the one who heard voices, I'm talking about another sister. This one ran away from home a few years ago. We don't know where she is. We don't really talk about her anymore. (We don't really talk about anything anymore.)

Anyway, in case you're reading this a hundred years after I've written it: The year is now 1436. If you know much about history, you'll realize that I'm writing this four years after my sister died, and that happens to be five years after the war between England and France ended. (Guess how that happened?)

I already told you how my sister's story began. She said she heard voices. And then she decided to share this little piece of information with King Charles VII. (Tell me that isn't crazy.)

My parents were kind of shocked, as you could imagine. And then, from what I heard, she got permission from the king to help the French regain control of Orleans from the evil English. My sister, a girl, going off to war was the strangest thing I have ever seen.

A year later, we heard the news. Charles the VII is the official ruler of France! No more interference from the English. Yay! That was my first reaction. But then my sister didn't come home for a month...

Okay, no big deal. She probably has some business to attend to or something. Calm down...

But no, three months go by, and she still hasn't returned. I'm worried. I start to hear my parents whispering a lot. I try to hear what they are saying, but when they realize I'm listening, my mother shuts down, and my father shoots me a look that makes me never want to eavesdrop again.

So it takes a while, but I finally receive the news.

My sister has died.

No, she didn't die.

She was murdered.

She was burned to death.

She was nineteen.

And it was all King Charles' fault. He could have saved her. I mean, she saved him, so why couldn't he save her? The stupid Burgundian people captured her and handed her to the stupid English people. Obviously the English people were really upset with her because she was an honored hero in the eyes of the French. So she was captured and questioned, and even though she admitted to them that she was wrong, they didn't care. They still burned her.

**They burned my
sister.
I loved my sister.**

They burned my sister.

I loved my sister.

My sister's name was Jehanne d'Arc, otherwise known as Joan of Arc. She's the famous one, the crazy one, the one who heard voices. The one who was burned at the stake. I still can't believe it..

I'm just her sister. The one no one knows, the one left behind to cope with all this grief.

It's great fun being me. Really. But I'm going to go now.

Profile of My Princess

By Freda Bader

“IIIIIII wish I was a MaccaBEE, so BIG! And STRONG! And braaaave... How can I BE a MaccaBEE, I’m only 3 years oooold...”

Leora learned this ditty in pre-school. Most grownups, like the one who wrote this song, don’t give kids enough credit. In our busy lives, we look with envy on kids who get to sleep ten hours a night and spend the day at school drinking apple juice. We forget that kids have trials and tribulations, too.

One Friday, Leora and I were putting together a puzzle on the black carpet in her living room when she paused to remark: “Sometimes the ABC’s are hard. Some are difficult and some are not. G is hard.”

“G is hard?”

“Yeah. You can make a G, but I don’t know. G, A, Q. Um, R.” I drew an R for her. “Nooo... to make an R, you draw a D, and then a leg.”

“Oh.”

She noticed her little sister, Hannah, coloring. “That’s okay if she colors,” she assured me. Looking out for Hannah’s well-being is a full time task Leora takes very seriously. “Y. Next is uhh, O. O. O. O. I know how to make an O. It’s just a little easier to make....lines.”

The road to literacy is arduous. How many of us remember how we struggled with just holding our pencils, with studying the alphabet from the peeling stickers on our desks?

Leora’s curly brown bob bent over her princess puzzle as she strategically matched up the faces first. I leaned against the couch and watched her identify the owner of a tiara.

“You really like princesses, huh? What makes them so cool?”

“I love princesses.”

“Could it be because your middle name is Malka?”

Leora borrowed a green crayon and some paper from Hannah and proceeded to write her name, except for the R. Then she engaged herself in one of her favorite pastimes, speaking “Hebrew”:

“yeshdi ora kילו zehlo zeh ken,” she said as she exhibited her talent for drawing O’s.

Leora's favorite book is *Madeline*, and she gave me a brief synopsis: "The girl falls in the water, and then the dog takes her out, and she survives."

What Leora
doesn't realize
is that she can
be a Maccabee.

Sometimes it's tough for Leora, because she can't read her favorite book herself. She often sits next to the window in her room, flipping through the pictures, while waiting for a willing grownup to show up. Much to her chagrin, Leora finds that grownups always seem to be available when it's time to tuck her into bed, which she describes as her least favorite time of the day.

What Leora doesn't realize is that she can be a Maccabee. The Maccabees weren't big and strong; the Greeks were. The Maccabees were kind, principled, and sedulous.

All Leora has to do is keep looking out for her sister, draw R the right way and not give up on G. She'll get there.



Belle

By Alyza Lampert

Perfection

By Hadassa Spira

She was perfect. Perfect hair. Perfect voice. Perfect clothing. Perfect teeth. Perfect everything. But all this perfection was decorated with beautiful lies. Why is it always the perfect ones who get the prince, the happily ever after? Everyone loves her story, the perfect tale of the girl who could do no wrong. But now I'm ready to tell my story, the true story.

Mother always liked Anastasia better. Mother said I was stupid. I was okay with being second best until Mother decided to fall in love. She said she was in love with Him, but I think she was in love with his money.

He didn't come alone. He had a daughter: Ella. When I first her, she wore an emerald gown. She was ravishing. Her Barbie blond hair fell to her waist and her cheeks were flushed as if she had just run up a flight of steps. Her fawn eyes screamed innocence—those eyes fooled everyone. But I saw through her facade. She disgusted me.

With a bat of an eyelash, she had my dear mother wrapped around her finger. Gone were the days of morning breakfast and teas with my mother, now it was all about Ella. She sat there, her father and my mother on each side of her, throwing her head back in girlish, dainty giggles. She caught my eye across the room and smiled. How dare she! She was mocking me. This atrocious girl dared to barge into my house, my life, and uproot everything!

Then her father died. Mother became a shadow of herself. She retreated to her room and didn't leave her bed for days. When she emerged, she was a new woman, a woman who took out all of her misery and despair on Ella. Finally, my mother, my sister and I became allies! We were joined by one cause: putting this good-for-nothing girl in her place.

Exiled from her room in the luxurious quarters of the house, Ella was sent to live in the servant quarters. All of her extravagant play toys were divided evenly between Anastasia and me, and Ella was put to work. Work, work, work. Scrub the floor, wash the dishes, polish the silver, feed the farm animals. She worked until her head ached and her fingers bled. And then we made her work some more.

Over time, these changes took a toll on Ella. Her long ringlets became matted and her flawless skin became caked with dirt, ash, and cinder. She became Cinderella. One day as she sat, head stooped, mending the hemline of my dress, I caught a glimpse of something that stopped my heart: There she sat, covered in dirt, a filthy smock around her waist and a soiled, ragged scarf on her head, and she had never looked prettier! Never! And I had never hated her more.

A few days later, a letter arrived from the palace announcing that his royal majesty, the crowned prince, would hold a ball where he would choose a wife to wed. I was ecstatic! This was my opportunity to step out of the shadows, my time to prove to Cinderella that I was better than she was. When she thought I wasn't looking, I spied her pick up the invitation (the snoop!) and begin to read,

Her long hair
became matted,
and her flawless
skin became caked
with dirt, ash and
cinder. She became
Cinderella.

a wistful gleam in her eyes. My heart began to quake: Here she was again, trying to undo everything I had ever dreamed of. Then again, who would want her, a dirty peasant? Ha! If she even thought for a blink of an eye that she was any form of competition, she was dead wrong. Dead wrong. (Right?)

I should have known! I should have known from the moment I saw the determination in her cunning eyes. I should have known she would go beyond extremes to show everyone that a simple peasant girl could outshine me. What did I ever do to her to make her hate me so much? Why did she have to go and betray my family and me? The prince is now her husband, the husband to a heartless guttersnipe.

Now every day she wakes in the bed that should be mine, eats the food that should be mine, and lives the life that I always dreamed of—and all because she is perfect.

Cinderella

By Talya Leiter



The Plan

By Draisny Friedman

“She actually compared your hair to a poodle?”

“Yes.”

“And what did you say?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“That is what I said, yes.”

“Nothing?!”

“Is that the only thing you can say?”

“I just find that slightly difficult to believe, that’s all.”

“Do you?”

“Yes. Actually I’d sooner believe you spend your spare time in . . . um . . . magical rainbow land. Or something.”

“You are bad at metaphors.”

“That wasn’t a metaphor.”

“Yes, it was.”

“No, it wasn’t.”

“Did you call me just to argue about metaphors?”

“No, I . . . wait a sec, I just thought of something. When you said “nothing” did you mean you just walked away or you just didn’t say anything?”

“ . . . ”

“ I mean, you didn’t just hit her or something, right?”

“ . . . ”

“Lily.”

“ . . . ”

“Oh, I can’t believe you.”

“ . . . I said nothing. That was all you told me not to do last time. Although, apparently you did not believe I could actually do it.”

“ . . . You know, it wouldn’t kill you to use a contraction.”

“I do not wish to.”

“Great. You’re speaking like a character from a fantasy novel, and we’re off topic. I think we should end this conversation. Just try not to hit anyone next time, okay?”

“Fine.”

All things considered, everything had gone much better than she’d expected.

Fine, Lily punching that girl wasn’t part of The Plan. Then again, Lily was touchy about her hair. And her clothes. And her shoes. Actually, for a girl who refused to do anything normally, Lily was touchy about a lot of cliché things. Maybe she had a hidden girly side?

She knew
Becky was
planning
something...
She just didn’t
know what it
was.

That idea was so laughable that Becky had to postpone her pondering of The Plan to giggle to herself for ten minutes. And spend the next ten wondering if Lily actually was a secret girly-girl and she was just a terrible friend and hadn’t noticed. The next thing she knew, it was 10:30.

Becky sighed. What am I even doing? I need to stop this. Finding Lily’s secrets is the whole point of The Plan. But it’ll never work if I can’t sit down and concentrate for more than ten seconds.

Determined, she went downstairs to search for a pen and paper. She was going to write down her thoughts so she could stay on topic. On paper, not on a computer. Computers always led to distraction.

Now all she had to do was figure out where they kept the pens in this house. Or the paper, for that matter.

One of the things Lily prided herself on was being observant. She was also quite proud of her friendship with Becky, even if it had been slipping lately. So naturally, she knew Becky was planning something. She knew it was probably unlikely to work. She just didn’t know what it was.

It was driving her just a tiny bit crazy.

Lily was actually starting to lose track of what was going on. She hadn’t even realized that girl was part of the plan until Becky called her and asked if anything

interesting had happened today. Lily wouldn't have punched her if she'd known. Probably.

Lily frowned. Despite how flippant she'd been with Becky, she wasn't proud of hitting that girl. Her temper was not one of the things she was proud of. And Becky was friends with her anyway. Becky, who never lost her temper, not even the time Lily had called her fat in second grade.

I'm jealous of her, Lily realized. I'm jealous of my best friend. Another thing I can be ashamed of.

"Hey, Lily."

"..."

"Look, about yesterday--"

"I am sorry I punched you."

"Oh, don't worry about that; you barely touched me."

"Still, I am sorry."

"...Do you ever use contractions?"

"Rarely."

"Um...okay. So about yesterday...look, I don't actually think your hair looks like a poodle."

"Thank you."

"Really, I don't! It's just--"

"Becky asked you to."

"How...?"

"She is my friend. And she does this type of thing often."

"So you know she thinks you're mad at her?"

"..."

"Should I take that as no?"

Running. Lily thought. Another thing I'm not good at.

She did it anyway, because she needed to find Becky and tell her what a complete idiot she was before she exploded. Joy from having actually apologized for once might have something to do with it too.

Finally Lily spotted her. She attempted to stop, but it didn't go so well, and she and Becky and Becky's many books all end up in a jumbled mess on the floor.

"Lily?" Becky asked. "What in the world are you doing?"

"She told me," Lily said. "That you still think I'm mad at you for that. How can you be so stupid?"

"She told you? But I had this whole plan. She was supposed to start this whole rivalry with you and then—"

"We would become friends, and I would express my intense hatred of you to her, only for her to report it back to you?"

Becky looked miffed. "Of course not! My plans are way more complex than that!" She paused then smiled softly. "Are you really not mad at me?"

Lily laughed. "No one can get mad at you, Becky. You're amazing. You never say anything mean, you never get mad at anyone. I wish I could to that." She looked down. "That's the only reason I ever get mad at you. I'm just jealous."

Becky turned to smile at her best friend. "I like you just the way you are," she said. "And... thanks." Her smile turned slightly evil. "Now, did I hear you use a contraction or was I just imagining things?"

"Imagining things." Lily said firmly. Becky giggled and Lily thought that, yes, she wished she could be like her. But right now, she was happy just being herself.

I'm Sorry

By Tamar Eisenberg

I didn't know if it was the whistling winds, the dark night, or my fear that caused me to shudder. I sat in silence, huddled in a corner with blankets and layers of clothing. There was no sound to be heard in the still night except for the chattering of my teeth. Why does it have to be this way? Why me? What did I do wrong that I have to suffer so terribly?

I was harsh, I was cold, and I was cruel. I didn't hold back, not even for a moment. I presented to you what reality is like in third world countries; the challenges people go through daily are devastating! Maybe you gained a sense of this, if you found yourself in my sightline on Sunday.

The absence of light is difficult to live with. Days and nights pass by, and each one feels like an eternity. A glimpse out the window brings tears to my eyes as I stare at what was once the boardwalk; now all that remains are piles of wooden planks. As time goes by, I wonder, will this ever change? I can't stand to remember my previous standard of living for fear that it might never resurface.

You say I detained light, warmth, and happiness, that I seized the "fundamental" things in your life: possessions, fancy cars, businesses, boutiques, cafés. You may think these are of primary importance, but I recommend thinking again.

In the morning, I take a stroll down Elm Street and look at vacant lawns – what used to be people's homes, my home. Except there's no need for that word, because "mine" no longer exists. The town is covered in sand, cars are tossed astray on sidewalks, boats are washed up on people's backyards. Basements are flooded, businesses are bankrupt, and trees upon trees have fallen to their graves. Whoever did this, what were you thinking? How could you wreck our lives like this?

You think the worst of me, but I didn't mean for it to be this way. My intention was only to bring unity. G-d sent me to teach everyone a lesson: to appreciate what you have in life. It's not the physical you should focus on, but the spiritual. You must thank G-d for what you have and not pine for more. You might think this is absurd. How could this have happened? Who would bring such a calamity upon your town? With great dismay, I confess: it was me, Sandy.



A Woman's Flight

By Yaeli Spira



MHS Can Do It!

By Adina Feder

A Peek Behind the Iron Curtain

By Rivka Kurtz

Mrs. Gitelman still bears a gentle Russian accent, although she's been living in the United States since 1992. Her English is good though, thanks in part to NYANA, the organization that assisted her and gave her English classes when she was new to this country. We sat across from each other on the living room couch, my violin still resting on the coffee table next to us after our weekly lesson, as Mrs. Gitelman began her story.

She grew up under the Communist regime of the USSR in a small city in what is now Ukraine. The violin was part of her life from a young age. "I started when I was nine," she said. Mrs. Gitelman explained that her parents grew up poor without opportunities to receive a good education, and they wanted better for their children. This motive, coupled with the cultural norm of teaching children to play instruments, was why Mrs. Gitelman began learning violin. "It wasn't mandatory," Mrs. Gitelman said. "My brother didn't want." And so he didn't learn. Then Mrs. Gitelman smiled, lighting up her face framed by wavy red hair, and told me about the boy next door who didn't want to play violin anymore. His father broke his violin.

Mrs. Gitelman started getting serious about violin when she began college. After four years of college, Mrs. Gitelman went on to study music in a conservatory and eventually got a job playing in an orchestra. At this point in her story, she laughed her light, bright laugh. "We worked four hours a day," she told me. "It was a great job." But life in the USSR wasn't so simple. She told me in her soft, warm voice how it was hard for Jews to get into the universities they wanted, how they had to know important people there.

Not only was it hard for Jews to get into universities, it was hard for Jews to be Jewish at all. Mrs. Gitelman told about the synagogue in her city that was taken away from the Jews and used as a concert hall. There was another smaller synagogue, she said, but only adults were allowed to go because the Communists didn't want Jewish traditions to be passed to the next generation. Police would stand outside the synagogue on holidays like Yom Kippur to make sure that only those who were allowed to attend synagogue attended. Kids were taught atheism in school. "My parents were religious," Mrs. Gitelman said. Her father went to synagogue all the time. But she and her brother didn't grow up religious, and since she couldn't, her children didn't either. However, when her family moved to the United States, her fifteen-year-old son started attending synagogue because other boys in the neighborhood did. "He liked it," she smiled.

But the journey from Russia to America was a hard one. People were already

leaving Russia in the 1970s, during the time of perestroika, but it wasn't so easy for everyone. In her lilting accent, Mrs. Gitelman explained how some people lost their jobs before they left because nobody wanted to keep on workers that were leaving. "People were in limbo for many years," Mrs. Gitelman said seriously, sitting stiffly at the end of the couch. They were stuck without jobs and nowhere to go. Mrs. Gitelman acknowledged that it was much easier for her to leave than it was for those who tried in earlier years since the USSR had already crumbled

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by the time she left with her family in 1992. "We decided we wanted to go," she said. The family just needed a relative or someone to come to in the United States, and they were home free. She had no problem leaving her job.

Mrs. Gitelman prepared for her arrival in the United States by taking English classes in Russia before she emigrated. She said that her vocabulary was very good, but she didn't really know how to put the words together. When she arrived in the United States she was assisted by an NYANA, an organization that helps immigrants to the United States. "They gave us English classes, they gave us professional classes," she remembered. The teacher was very good, she added impishly. Mrs. Gitelman now speaks English fluently, albeit with a softly rolling accent that stretches some syllables and narrows others.

Mrs. Gitelman feels that the culture here is different than it is in Russia. She believes that child-parent relationships are stricter in Russia, and that the schooling system works differently. Here, she exclaimed, "If you don't want physics, take biology!" In Russia, she said, students can't choose their subjects and electives like they can in American schools. Everybody must take the same subjects. Even in the conservatory, everyone took basically the same classes. After considering the matter a bit, Mrs. Gitelman decided that kids got a good education in Russia, and that now there are so many Russian doctors and artists. She said that she had to read all of the Russian classics in school. Here, she says about school, "If you don't want, no one can force. There, you had to learn."

As Mrs. Gitelman gathered her coat and pocketbook and started making for the door, she suddenly turned around to face me before she stepped outside. "You know, I'm Rivka too," she said to me, before adding, "But you know, we were never called by our Jewish name."

Aether

By Rochelle Chechick

Faster. I have to go faster. If I go faster than maybe I'll get there. I don't know exactly where it is, but it's somewhere. It has to be.

So I go faster and faster. I run until my legs burn. I'll never stop. I can't stop. If I stop, then something bad will happen. I don't know exactly what, but something.

As I am running down the block, I hear Mom call me back. I don't go. Instead, I run faster. I know she can't catch me. No one can run as fast as me. Only Dad.

When I was little, I believed that if I ran fast enough, I would get to Aether. I didn't know what it would be like there. All I knew is that no one would be able to get there. Only me and Dad.

"Come on, Pips." Dad smiles at me. "You'll never get anywhere if you're that slow." He's far ahead of me. So I run faster, trying to catch up.

We ran together, trying to get there. He was the only grown-up who believed me when I told him about my magical place. He told me he also tried to get there. He called it Aether. He said that the only time to get there was the exact moment of sunset.

"Dad, wait up." I try to run as fast as him. He slows down just enough for me to catch up to him. We laugh as we run together.

Every summer I would take a train up to the beach and run, trying to get to Aether. That's where Dad and I ran together when I was little. This time I have to get there, I think. This time I really have to get away.

"DAD!" I scream. He's running too fast. I can't see him anymore. "DADDY!" I run faster. "Answer me." I can almost hear his voice. Just beyond my reach. "Please." He doesn't answer.

So I run and run. Faster and faster. But I'm not going fast enough. The sun is starting to set. I keep running. The lower the sun sinks, the faster I go.

"DAD!" I scream for him. "Why won't you answer me?"

The sun is gone. I keep running. I have to get there.

Then I think I see him. He's smiling at me.

The sun sets.

I see him. He looks tired. He is lying down. Why? What's going on?

Everyone is talking. They say words that don't make any sense. Just a bunch of random sounds flying around the room. I don't talk because there is nothing to say. Everyone is wearing black. Everyone except me. Dad never wore black, and neither will I.

He was the only
grown-up who
believed me when
I told him about
my magical place.

"Why aren't you crying? Don't you miss him?" Linda yells at me. I don't say anything. "Don't you have a heart?" I still don't say anything. "Cry." I stare at the wall behind her. The paint is starting to peel.

I collapse. I breathe. In and out. A tear escapes. Then another. And then another. I cry.

"Idiot!" I whisper to myself. And I am. I'll never get to Aether. I'll never get there because it doesn't exist. All these years I ran, trying to get there, and I couldn't, because it isn't there. It never was.



Afghan Girl

By Sarah Mayerfeld

Dystopian at Age Eleven: A Profile of Rebecca Stern

By Mickey Kopelowitz

“Salutations,” Rebecca grins at me. “I’m ready to spill the beans.”

The “beans” Rebecca refers to are not nearly as scandalous as one might imagine. Rebecca is a surprisingly normal individual: at 23 years old, Rebecca Stern, who is Orthodox, is pursuing a Masters in Biomedical Engineering at MIT. She doesn’t have any apparent obstacles. “In fact,” Rebecca admits, blushing, “My main issue has always been my intellect. That’s all the dirt I’ve got.”

Intellect is a strange topic for a profile piece about adversity. Still, Rebecca maintains that her intelligence has always been her “greatest challenge”: “When I was growing up, I had a hard time interacting with my peers. Intellectually I was so much more advanced than they were, but emotionally I was stunted. I didn’t know how to connect with them, and I wasn’t friends with anyone my own age.”

So who were Rebecca’s friends? “I hung out with my aunt, and other kids four or five years older than me. At least we were on the same level, in terms of books and other entertainments we enjoyed. Even then, though, I didn’t really fit in, because these teenagers couldn’t get over the fact that I was only a little girl. My age kind of creeped them out, so for the most part, I didn’t have friends at all.”

Rebecca feels that her overactive, overly mature brain prevented her from developing the way ordinary children did. “I never believed in magic,” she says. “I knew it was impossible.” She read books that were way above her grade level, and this exposed her to themes and philosophies that most children would never consider. She studied body language as a sixth grader, and for a long time “couldn’t see people without analyzing their stance, checking for hidden intents and meanings.” Rebecca’s tendency to overanalyze social interactions led her to believe that all people were liars, and this preempted any friendships. “I couldn’t trust anyone. I was a dystopian at age eleven, and I had a hard time believing that anyone—other than my parents—could really love me. I never had the gift of simple naïveté; mine was a bleak childhood.”

Rebecca’s life changed when she was 13. She took an IQ test and scored a 135. “That made me a certified adolescent genius. I really freaked out.”

But “freaking out” may have been the best thing ever to happen to her. “At that point I realized that I wasn’t going to change. My brain was my handicap, but I was determined to adapt. More than a decade of social disconnect had left me feeling empty inside... Even Thoreau, my usual security blanket, couldn’t calm me down... Once I knew that my peers would never catch up to my level, I was determined to meet them at theirs.”

Rebecca Stern

Rebecca decided to go to a high school in a different community so that her brainy reputation wouldn't precede her. "It's not that I was ashamed to be smart, but it did make my life more complicated. I wanted to start over somewhere fresh, so that I could make friends before they found out who I was."

Not that Rebecca's intelligence cost her any friends. "By the time the girls realized exactly how smart I was, we'd already become close. My high school classmates were the first people to see my personality before my test scores. It was the most liberating feeling."

Rebecca's friends introduced her to the joy of being a teenager. "We'd go out for coffee, shopping... these were things I'd never done before." They also got her hooked on contemporary fiction: "in my pre-friendship days, I never would have read a book like *Harry Potter*. I would've written it off as nonsense."

I'm ready
to spill the
beans.

Rebecca's best friend from high school was a talented actress. One year she convinced Rebecca to try out for the school play, and Rebecca landed the lead role. "That was a huge milestone for me. I was using my imagination to be emotional. I was learning to emphasize with others, and that is a key aspect of friendship. I learned to appreciate people for their personalities, and not just for their brains. I was finally growing up."

Rebecca cried at her high school graduation. "It was my first time crying in public; usually my tears were between me and my pillow. I was so overwhelmed by how far I'd come in just four years. I didn't want to leave."

Still, leave she did. Rebecca's perfect SAT scores earned her a free ride to MIT, her dream college. There Rebecca continues to forge relationships and be in touch with her emotions. Rebecca concludes: "I am so grateful to my high school friends. They were my first friends, and they gave me the gift of love. They showed me how to live."

Rebecca, as I see her tonight, is very much alive.

The Woman Within

By Sharony Polinsky

I.

What are you laughing about?

She has this huge grin tacked on to her face, shoulders heaving up and down in time with the chuckle emanating from her mouth.

The table is quiet. We're talking about serious things. What's to laugh about?

In our chairs we begin to exchange bewildered glances.

"Little Chaim. He's so funny, dis one. What a chevraman. A little yentale." She continues to laugh. We try to do the same, but . . .

There's no Chaim here... Maybe she just didn't bear us. That must be it.

I call out, "Everyone, from now on, talk louder."

"Good night." I gently close her door.

But she is not ready to return this greeting. She begins mumbling, "I cannot sleep. Not here. Definitely not. Whose bed is dis one? It must be his."

She climbs out of her bed in an urgent, desperate manner and stumbles out of her room.

"What are you doing? I just kissed you good night! Now it's time to sleep," I say, slightly disconcerted.

"No, no, no. He's sleeping in dis. In dis...you know in dis... ched." She breathes, as though calming down now that she got the word out.

Ched? Wow, things are getting worse.

"What do you mean?"

"You don't know?" She tries again, frustrated. "Someone else is . . . pilling in dis bed. Not me. Okay?"

"What? No. No one else is sleeping in your bed tonight. It's just for you."

"No, no. Esther told me personally he is going to be pilling—"

Funny how she speaks so definitively, like how she used to. She made you feel like you could believe everything she said—but now I have no idea what she's trying to tell me. And who is Esther?

But wait. Maybe I can utilize this Esther-thing.

"Don't worry. Esther also told me that the bed is yours now."

“Come.” I gently nudge her arm, trying to steer her back into her room.

She needs to sleep. Nights don’t seem to bring out the best in her...

“So it is cheddning for me?” She tries to make peace between her thoughts and what I’m telling her.

“Yes. It’s yours,” I say assuredly, trying to win her trust.

“Out. Out. Out,” she mumbles. “He’s sleeping. I need to go. Now. I need to buy tings. I’m not staying here. Nobody wants me to go by myself, well I’m sorry, but I can do what I want. Not Esther. Not him. Not dis one. Not dat one. I can go. I can do. Dis is dis.”

II.

I dash down the refrigerator aisle of the supermarket. We don’t have any milk left for breakfast. Suddenly, I feel two fingers playfully pinch my side in that nostalgically familiar way.

I whip around.

She looks up at
me with those
sad, vacant
eyes and asks,
“Is dis my
house?”

Uh-oh. This is not happening.

Am I seeing correctly? Are you by yourself, at seven thirty in the morning, wearing your house coat, with a little jacket, in forty degree weather, without a cane or a walker?!”

“Wha, what are you doing here?” I clumsily stammer, trying to mirror her insanely out of place smile, but failing miserably.

She registers the question and replies without batting an eyelash, “Well, she tells me.”

There’s the ambiguous ‘she’..

“dat I need to buy here..dose em..”

“Nobody asked you to buy anything.”

Only the tiniest fraction of the emotions within me escape in this sentence. I am on the verge of hysteria.

You, my warm, loving, caring, favorite person... I know you always want to buy things for everyone, make everyone feel loved. But not now. Please, not

here. Not like this. You must be freezing! You could have gotten lost! Do you have money? Does anyone even know where you are?

This is not a situation little me can deal with.

Nothing I say can change her mind.

Nothing I say can make her understand.

Not since she has been diagnosed with dementia.

She's living in her memory.

I'm living in the present.

And there's a disconnect.

III.

The shrill sound of the phone ringing startles me in my bed. The clock on my night table displays a time far too late for the phone to be ringing.

I answer, my hand trembling slightly, and hear her voice speaking incoherently.

"Hi!" I interrupt, masking my fear with an affected cheerful tone—trying to infect her with it and end this conversation before it even starts.

"You tell me right now if you know who dis guy is!"

I jump from the force of her tone.

"Dis guy over here, he says he is...he is...I don't know what...dis stranger! He sits here and tells me he is my hubband. You tell him right now he is not. You get out!" I hear her call back into her house.

My heart sears with every word I hear. Without a thought, I drop the phone and walk to her house.

"Get him out—why won't you make him leave?" she pleads when she sees me.

Tears drip from her eyes.

"If you don't make dis guy leave, I will. Dats it. Take me home. Please. Now. I want to go home."

My lips feel cemented shut.

I yearn to explain everything.

Don't worry. You're safe here, with your loving, devoted husband of 50 years. This is your home. And everything's going to be okay.

But to this woman, this shadow of a person...

"Come," I finally say. "Let's go take a walk. I'll take you home."

We leave.

IV.

We walk around the block.

We are back at the very same door of her house, this blessed, happy house.

She looks up at me with those sad, vacant eyes and asks:

"Is dis my house?"

"Yes," I reassure this once vivacious, warm, smart woman, "You're home."

Until next time.



Little Women

By Miryam Golding

Prayers by the Dozen

By Sarala Weissman

13th Avenue. The streets are littered with trash. A mountain of crumpled-up boxes lie at the edge of the sidewalk, just peeping out onto the black, smokey road. Throngs of people bustle from store to store, like bees to their honeycombs. The blocks are squashed with houses straining towards the sky.

I stand outside the deep purplish-reddish, three-family house planted on 13th avenue and 46th street. I knock on the intricately designed entranceway. A child, around the age of 15, cracks the door slowly open. “Is your mom home?” I stick my head in furtively. “Hi! Come in. Come in,” a buoyant voice calls. Mrs. Chumie Miller, a kerchief wrapped around her head, is reclining on an easy-chair, its fabric frayed and worn, its royal-blue now a peachy-white.

It is 8:30 P.M. A warm aroma drifts through the dining room as several children dawdle about, finishing their homework and the scraps off their dinner-plates. They are stalling their bedtime.

I settle into the couch and ask Chumie to tell me what it’s like to hold down a job while raising a family of 12 children.

Chumie works five days a week as a preschool teacher at Bais Yaakov of Boro Park. Trying to get everyone out the door in time for school is no easy feat, especially given that, as Chumie tells me, she is “not a morning person . . . *at all.*” But Chumie is adamant about keeping the atmosphere calm despite the morning rush: “That is my belief and motto as a mother, that kids should be sent off and starting the day in a calm and peaceful way.”

In the Miller household, there is a system for everything, and bedtime, specifically for the youngest of the bunch, is the focal point around which everything revolves. Lucky for Chumie, her older kids are able to help her out – one of the benefits of having a large family.

Preparing supper for a family of 14 is no small feat, and it becomes immeasurably more complicated by the severe allergies suffered by one of her children, her son, Bentzion. While things have vastly improved since his first years, Chumie prepares dinners with her son’s dietary restrictions in forefront of her mind.

At 12 years old, Bentzion is Chumie’s sixth child, and from the beginning they knew he had severe allergies. Only months old, he was constantly breaking out in rashes and suffered from terribly dry skin. At ten months, the only substance he could safely tolerate was a special formula called Necote that had to be imported from Europe. Financially, the strain was too much to bear: each bottle cost \$12. Multiply that cost by the eight times a day Bentzion would drink the formula,

and that brought the cost to \$64 a day, or \$35,040 a year.

Things got even more difficult for Chumie when Bentzion began attending school. Chumie had to send letters to and personally petition the Board of Education to provide a health para — someone who would attend to Bentzion for the duration of the school day to ensure his safety. The incredibly intense school preparations included contacting the pediatrician, the teachers, room assistants, and school personnel, phoning and sending them all letters of explanation. But Chumie recalls that the one who had it hardest of all was little Bentzion.

“He knew he was different because he would walk into school with an extra person,” Chumie explains. This led to a host of psychological issues: Because Bentzion wasn’t able to control what he ate, and because he felt that he had no control over his immediate circumstances, he tried to wield greater control over the other parts of his life. He became a selective mute — choosing not to talk in school. This, in turn, led to other behavioral issues. For example, Bentzion’s refusal to speak meant he wouldn’t even ask to use the restroom during the school day, causing many an accident. “We have come a long way since then,” Chumie says as she leans towards me, nodding her head for emphasis.

As a toddler, Bentzion would sometimes “sneak through the garbage after everyone was done eating, when they weren’t looking, and grab some leftovers. He would hide and lock himself in a closet to devour it.” For Chumie’s little boy, something as trivial as snatching an unattended bread crust could turn into a major health scare. Seemingly harmless foods could send Bentzion into anaphylactic shock.

Although Bentzion’s diet was severely restrictive, Chumie tried not to impose those regulations on her other children’s eating habits, although the Miller household was peanut-free for years. As a result of having a sibling with severe allergies, Chumie’s children have learned responsibility; they read food labels and the listings of ingredients closely and are careful in the choices they make about what foods are safe to bring home.

For Chumie, one of the most challenging aspects of Bentzion’s allergies had to do with extended family get-togethers. “There was tons of food and tons of people,” Chumie says, and it was hard to keep track of Bentzion and make sure he wasn’t wolfing down anything that might pose a health threat. Knowing that she couldn’t always be present, Chumie devised a novel way to protect her son: she’d hang a sandwich board sign over Bentzion. One side warned against handouts by blaring the word STOP! while the other side explained, ALLERGIC! The result was

just what she was aiming for, he was readily identified as “the allergic kid.”

What really helped her was prayer.

Chumi credits a “great support system” made up of family and friends for helping her through this rough period. But what really helped her was prayer. “Not the sitting down with a sefer Tehilim twenty minutes a day, but the informal conversations with Hashem. Like, ‘please Hashem, it’s a busy day, and I don’t have time to suddenly run to the emergency room,’” Chumie adds jokingly, yet quite serious.

As we wrap up our conversation, a young teenager with brunette curls tentatively walks up to Chumie, holding out a crumpled sheet of paper.

“You want me to sign this?” Chumie asks, straightening it out.

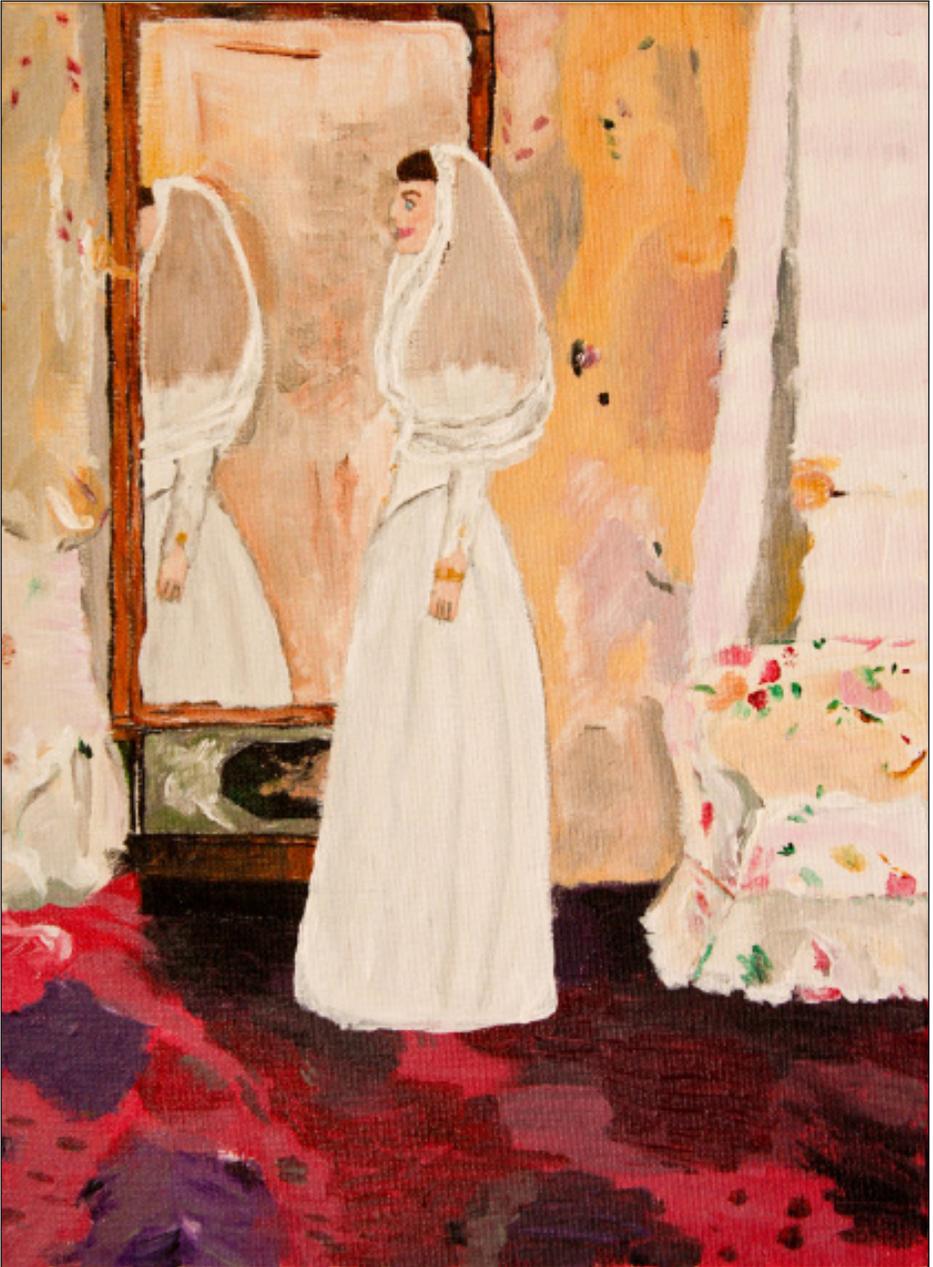
“Yeah.”

“Did you study?”

“Yeah.”

“Study until you have it internalized.”

Even while she is giving an interview, Chumie is still constantly on call for all of her children.



My Mother's Wedding Day

By Shayna Palley

Principal Dancer or Keeping My Principles

By Moriah Berg

My right hand clutches the barre, knuckles red, chin high. My eyes dart away from the teacher and away from the mirror.

Don't look for a nod of approval.

A real ballet dancer knows when it feels right and when it feels wrong. Miss Debbie used to say that you have to pretend that you have a little mirror in the palm of your hand, and you look at your palm, not at the teacher. You're a fancy lady with very long earrings that just nearly touch your shoulders. If you don't extend your neck with your chin up, the earrings will touch your shoulders — and that's very unattractive. So I extend my neck and stare at the little mirror in the palm of my hands.

I wish I could just dance, let go of the barre, and leap to any music Zoya decides to play. Sometimes, in the last 5 or 10 minutes of class, she puts on a random piece of music and lets me improvise. I love it. She always asks me if I recognize the composer or if I know from which ballet the piece is — I never know. Then when she tells me the answer, I say, Oh sure, of course, I knew that! I hope she believes me. She tells me that they are planning some sort of performance. It would be great if I had a solo. I know that I probably won't be able to perform, anyway. But there's always room for wishful thinking. I'm good at that. Maybe I will have a solo...

When I first started at the New York City Ballet Institute, they forced me to turn out 90 degrees, which I just couldn't do. Zoya took her stick and prodded my right foot — out, out, out... and then my left foot — out, out, out, and I cried. Every time my feet would turn slightly inward again, she would come back with her stick and force my feet out into a straight line. She stopped doing that after a while and I'm not sure why. Either my turnout improved, or she decided that I'm a lost cause, and my turnout will never be proper.

At the end of class, Zoya tells me that there is going to be a performance and they do, indeed, want me to have a solo. They are going to have lots of girls performing classical pieces, but because I'm also very good at jazz and modern dance, they want me to improvise and dance the way I do at the end of class. That's when I dance from my heart. I guess it would show prospective students that they offer all different kinds of dance classes...which they really don't.

Zoya takes me to the costume closet in the back of the room. The colorful and intricately designed tutu's that I always eyed wistfully are hanging there, beckoning. I immediately pick the bright red one. It has jewels on the chest in

the shape of a V and the bottom juts straight out to make a dancer look like she is standing in the center of a table covered in a beautiful tablecloth. Yes, the tutu is as stiff as a wooden table but not quite as heavy. I admire myself in the mirror, twirling and leaping, envisioning myself on the big stage where my mother takes me every year on my birthday, June 19, to see a ballet.

Then Zoya interrupts to tell me that this is not the costume she wants for me. I trudge to the back of the room, abandoning my arabesque poise, smiling at the tens of empty threadbare red velvet chairs. She shows me a plain black skimpy mini dress that tugs at my body. She tells me that I should let out my tight bun, so that my long, thick, black hair can whip while I dance. She puts on music that makes me think of a subway — and I start to dance. I try to forget she is watching because I am ashamed of the way the music makes me dance. I don't even have to check for a nod of approval. She is squealing in glee.

I tell her that I cannot perform. She knows that I am Orthodox, and I won't dance if there are men in the audience, especially not in this costume. The conversation moves to my not taking enough classes...that my parents pay for me to go to a prestigious private school and don't want to pay for more dance lessons. That we have our priorities mixed up. Then she tells me that I will never go far in life because I have missed so many classes because of Passover.

She tells me that I am ruining my future.

That I don't have to listen to my parents. That I should perform. That I can be so much more but I'm wasting my abilities. She tells me to throw away my religion. Yes, throw away my religion.

And as the tears fill my eyes, for once I don't care for her nod of approval.



Snow White

By Rivky Szczupakiewicz



Her Shabbos Table

By Atara Stern

Bubby Greenberg

By Ayelet Greenberg

Anyone who knows my grandmother can tell she escaped from the Nazis. Her war experience shaped her personality. She never wastes food and whenever something bad happens she davens because only Hashem can help. She loves every Jew just because he or she is Jewish, one unified nation who survived together through the Holocaust. However, my grandmother dislikes talking about the war because of her desire for Simcha. She doesn't want anyone to imagine the atrocities she lived through. Mustering up the courage, I finally asked her how she escaped Europe and what life was like during World War II.

Even though World War II started in 1939, the Germans didn't reach Vilna, my grandmother's home town, until 1941. My Bubby was eight years old when the

The Nazis may
have fought with
weapons, but my
Bubby fought
back with her
mouth, davening to
Hashem, and she
won.

Germans tore her life apart on June 22, 1941. The Nazis made a surprise attack, known as 'Operation Barbarosa,' on Russia. They gathered all the Rabbis first and slaughtered them all, her father included. Then, they viciously killed more people from Vilna. My Bubby told me "she was living alone," without any Rabbis, especially without her father. Luckily, her mother and brother lived with her. Because of my great-grandmother's love for chessed, she welcomed a young girl who by chance ended up in their apartment. My Bubby and her brother were the only children from Vilna to survive.

In September, the Nazis knocked on the door and said my grandmother "had 15 minutes to prepare to leave to the ghettos." With tears in their eyes, the family realized that these were going to be their last minutes living in the comfort of their own home. They left all their hard-earned possessions and precious sefarim behind and never saw them again.

The people living in the ghettos learned that when the Nazis came, you were to hide in a wall, called a Malinel. The last person, who came into the hole in the wall, pulled a string and moved the furniture against the wall. During one of these spontaneous hidings, a Yeshiva man made a deal with a Nazi to transport a car of Jews to Varonova; my Bubby along with her brother and mother were in the car. The rumor going around was that it would be better in Varonova, but it turned out to be worse. They stayed in Varonova for about four weeks and then secretly ran to Radin.

They escaped to Radin in hope that since it was in White Russia, the Jews would not be killed. They davened by the kever of the Chofetz Chaim, beseeching Hashem to save them from the merciless Nazis. However, their hopes were sadly crushed. The Nazis killed many Jews in Radin, so my Bubby, with her brother and mother, hid in an attic along with another family, who had a baby. The baby cried from all the commotion...

My grandmother stopped telling me the story because the ending was uglier than words; she didn't want to scare me by revealing any gruesome details. Because they were scared of getting caught, they stayed in 'a bombed-out house' every night. As trucks and soldiers chased them, they escaped from the ghetto

and hid in a pig sty. When the Nazis realized that a mother with two kids escaped from the ghetto, they searched for them. Miraculously they heard the Nazis footsteps going in the opposite direction, and they realized that Nazis had found and killed a different mother with two kids, thinking it was them.

Mustering up the courage, I finally ask her how she escaped Europe and what life was like during World War II.

They ran away and caught up with another group of fleeing Jews in the forest. A non-Jew, Jan Adamowich, who owned a house in the forest, hid the whole group. They also met up with the girl who had been sleeping in their house in Vilna. They hoped the war would end quickly,

but unfortunately it didn't. Jan's sons were Nazi soldiers, so it didn't dawn on the Nazis that Jan hid Jews. However, Jan was one of the chasidei umos ha'olam, and I owe him a lot of hakaras hatov, because if not for his kindness, I would not be here today.

After being hidden by Jan, they ran to Eishyshok, where nobody suspected that there would be killings. Despite this hope, there was a pogrom that killed many Jews. That night, my Bubby and her brother slept 30 feet away from where hundreds of Jews were killed. After the war, my grandmother, with her brother and mother, went through the DP camps and then finally, in 1948, after travelling through Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Italy, and Cuba, they finally arrived in America!

Fast forward 55 years, B"H my grandmother has five children, and many grandchildren. She constantly teaches me the lesson of 'baal tashchis', never

wasting. She doesn't waste anything, food in particular. A day before Pesach she brought home the leftover pizza crusts in a bag and ate them because she didn't want to throw them out. From witnessing the countless Chasadim of people who helped her survive, she focuses less on herself and more on other people. She made a wedding in her backyard for a poor Jew, one whom she didn't know well, all because of her desire to give. She always gave needy people living in Chicago warm meals, a place to stay, and a loving heart. Because of all the open miracles she lived through, she thanks Hashem everyday for everything that He gives her.

Since my grandmother was escaping, hiding and running for eight years of her life, when she arrived in America and furnished her house, she didn't purchase unnecessary items. The couches, picture frames, silver jewelry, china silverware... none of it was of help her. It was the torah, mitzvos, and tefilos that saved her.

The Nazis may have fought with weapons, but my Bubby fought back with her mouth, davening to Hashem, and she won.

The Stranger

By Tivka Nabaitian

I went from person to person thrusting my hand in the food in their plates. Grabbing whatever my hand could reach. No one used to stop me, so I thought it was okay. But now this new person has come to our home, and she won't stop bothering me. I have no idea who she is, but she seems to be interested in me, for she follows me everywhere.

I came down to breakfast this morning and started the usual taking from whomever's plate I felt like. I placed my hand on the hard table and felt around for a plate. I seized some eggs, and they were an inch away from my mouth. Then she was there and had my hand in hers. Her hand was coarse and reminded me of the itchy fabric I refuse to wear. She squeezed the slippery eggs out of my hand and picked me up. Before I knew it, I was sitting in a chair. I jumped up, but she was fast and had me down in an instant. I tried and tried, but she wouldn't let me go. A fork was placed in my hand. My hand in hers, the fork was brought to my mouth. I was outraged. Never in my life had I been forced to do what I didn't want. She released my hand, and I threw the fork. I sensed that she was leaving, and I felt relieved. But she was back in an instant, and, her hand harshly over mine, the fork was once again brought to my mouth. Why she was doing this perplexed me. I threw the fork again, hoping to tire her so that I could eat in peace. She had the fork and was trying to feed me once more with it. I didn't want to give in to the stranger.

I struggled some more, but now I was completely under her control. She held me down forcefully and put the fork in my mouth. I was hungry and had been struggling for a while. I allowed the fork into my mouth and swallowed the eggs. With less force than the last, the fork was in my mouth. She let go of my hand, leaving the fork in mine. She thought I was going to be that easy? I hurled the fork away. I stood up and ran away from the table. I felt the smooth cabinets and knew I was near the door. I was snatched by the woman and once again imprisoned by her strong arms. Sitting in the chair, the crazy woman planted the fork back in my mouth. I was wasting my energy. As much as I desired to leave, this person wanted me to eat with a fork.

With my remaining energy I felt for the woman's face and scratched her cheeks. She hit my hand and then held it down. I had one hand free, and she put the fork back in it. I wanted desperately to be freed from her grasp. I ate the food this time, and she let go of my hand. Now I ate with the fork by myself, and slowly she let go of me. Hesitantly, I stood up; she didn't stop me, so I continued on and left the room.

That was my first morning with the stranger. She taught me more and more every day. I learned to communicate with others. I learned how to behave properly. I learned that her name was Anne Sullivan and mine Helen Keller.

I, Lady Liberty

Brocha Leah Marmorstein





A Woman in Combat

By Yedida Kest

The Night I Ran

By Sheindel Rusanov

I ran. I ran and ran and kept on running. The October winds stung my cheeks, but I paid them no heed. The satisfying crunch of the leaves beneath my feet blended with the honks of the New York taxis and the laughing children of Central Park. My short brown ponytail flew behind me, reminding me of that night seven years ago. The night I left everything behind. The night I lost the most important part of my life: my mother.

It was the ninth of March, 2005. The icicles were beginning to drip down the roofs and onto the heads of the officers below. They were storming down the street, rifles out, progressing to the largest house on the block: mine. I wasn't home; I was hiding in Mi-Hyun's bedroom, watching. Watching as they broke down the door, watching as they tore down the pictures on the walls. Watching as they took our expensive dishes that Mama would put out when Father had important visitors. Watching as my strong, brave Mama was pulled out of our house by her beautiful hair. Watching them rip off her locket as she continued to stand tall and proud.

I was hiding...
Watching as my
strong, brave
Mama was pulled
out of our house
by her beautiful
hair.

My face was pressed against the window, but the scene outside became blurry through my wet eyes. Mi-Hyun would not let me leave. Mama was afraid this would happen so she had ordered Mi-Hyun to keep me here until the soldiers left.

"Where is your husband?" they shouted. Mama shook her head, stubborn.

"Answer me!" The resounding slap echoed throughout our street.

"Mama, Mama!" I sobbed, sinking to the floor. They continued to yell.

"Where is Lee Hung?" They were searching for my father, the general of the army, who had defected last night. He had been planning our escape from North Korea for months now. We had arranged to meet him across the border tonight. He would have our paperwork and documents for us to go to America, the land of the free.

I peeked out the window and saw a sight that will forever haunt me. My Mama, although bruised and bleeding, was not beaten. She looked straight into the second-in-command's eyes and said, "I will never tell you." Subtly, she looked in my direction and a ghost of a smile flitted across her face.

BANG!

One shot and my Mama was gone to the world. I don't remember what happened next. In my traumatized state, my mind blacked out the rest of the day.

Somehow, I managed to pack a small bag with food and water and stealthily make my way to the outskirts of town. I could see the forest, my tunnel to safety, in the distance, but I could only make it there if I could somehow find a way to vault the massive fence that stood before me, the wall that separated me from my freedom.

There! A tall oak tree stood nearby. I climbed it stealthily and jumped over the fence, practically tearing my leg in half. At last, I was out. The unnerving quiet of the woods gave me time to think. To recall the great woman that was my mother. To realize that her eyes would never see me again. Her mouth would never smile or sing me lullabies. Her arms would never hug me again; never again, would I feel her warm embrace.

It was nearly impossible for me to walk farther on my hurt leg. Looking closely, I saw that it was blue and swollen and most likely broken. I decided to rest for the night, so I walked around for a few minutes until I found a stream. The cool water soothed my burning leg. I took out a piece of Kimchi bread and bit into the hard crust when suddenly I heard the sounds of footsteps. I tried to hide behind a tree, but the man saw me.

"Bae Song Rim, why are you hiding from me?" my father asked. I smiled sheepishly, moving around the tree so he could see my leg.

"It is you! I thought it was the soldiers again," I whispered into his chest as I hugged him. He bent down and meticulously examined my leg, his years of army training kicking in.

"It is broken, Bae. We will have to be very careful with it. But where is your mother?"

I took a deep breath and prayed for strength.

"Dead."

We sat down, Father looking worse for wear. This crushing blow did not help his old heart. I gave him the rest of the Kimchi, but we were not hungry anymore.

After a long time, I spoke.

“Do you have the papers?”

“I do. It took much time, but the American counsel in South Korea finally handed our documents over. We’re going to America.” Father did not sound as excited as he had last night.

“We will be okay, Father. Mama believes in you,” I tried to reassure him. “She loves you.”

“She would be very proud of you, Bae.”

We went to sleep, and when we woke up it was as if we had made an unspoken oath not to speak of her again.

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half.

Our journey was ragged and slow; we could not travel far for the next couple of days because of my leg. However, a week later, we made it to Incheon, South Korea. From there, we took a boat to Shanghai and then a plane to Rome and, from there, another plane to New York.

America. The land of the free. We had finally made it. After months of planning and years of dreaming, we were finally here.

Father and I rented a small apartment in Brooklyn. Father went to look for work while I learned English. Within a year, I had become completely fluent in the language, and I began writing short stories. Our neighbor, Sara, a renowned children’s author, read one of my stories and sent it to her editor who had it published. I studied very hard and got accepted to NYU on a full scholarship. I am now majoring in journalism in hopes of teaching America about the situation in North Korea. The home of the brave should know about the true bravery of the people back home.

People like my mother.

The Forgotten One

By Dini Raskin

I see her again. She's trudging along the dusty alleyway towards the homeless shelter. With her young baby clutched in one bent forearm and her other hand pressed against her chest, she looks tense, distressed. Her cheeks are sallow and her skin tone porcelain white with a tinted green glow. I've been observing her for a week now, seeing her at the same time every day, 6:00 pm sharp, getting off the graffiti-splattered bus. Despite her obvious poverty (torn coat, tattered shoes and stained kerchief) and her physical impairment (noticeable limp), she has an almost aristocratic air about her. The one time I caught her eye I was taken aback by the intensity of her stare. I am ashamed that I have not yet lifted a hand to help this woman even though that's my job. I then make a decision that is long overdue.

There's that woman walking towards me, a woman whose slim figure I have seen before, watching me from afar. Who is she? Is she just another passerby afraid that I'll try to mooch her out of her money? Or is she watching just out of harmless curiosity? As the woman approaches, her stiletto heels click on the grimy street. She wears no makeup, with the exception of a thin layer of light pink lip-gloss. Her eyes are almost topaz with a tint of blue, and her glossy blond hair looks as though it would come down to her waist, if not for the tightly wound bun.

Our eyes meet, and I feel that familiar fear rising in my stomach, the fear of having social services take my baby away. That would be impossible, of course, because I'm not listed in government records. I was born to a woman ill suited to be a mother, who hadn't bothered to give birth in a hospital or send me to school. Her fear that her criminal past would catch up to her led her to avoid everything that might require that she provide identification, a name, an address, or photo. For the exact opposite reason, I did the same thing. I did it to protect my little girl, the only light in this dark world. As the woman gets closer and closer, I feel my heart palpitate with fear. My injured hand is slick with sweat. She's right in front of me as I utter the words, in the most defiant way I can muster: "How can I help you?"

This frail woman, with her torn clothes and attached baby, looks almost scared of me. I look down at my cheerful mint green cardigan and see no reason for her to be afraid. "Hi, I'm Audrey" I say. The woman has her guard up and looks a bit puzzled. I don't tell her what I really do for a living for fear that she'll sprint away into one or another of the many alleyways on her way to oblivion. "I'm an intern at the bank down the block, and well... my boss said I should give a little back to charity, so..." I was sure she would see through my charade, but she lets

out a sigh of relief and gives me a small smile. I'm sure we're around the same age, but she looks as though her soul is 100 years old. She tells me with a dignified air to continue. I cut right to the chase and say, "May I buy you something to eat?" pointing to the decrepit old coffee shop. She responds by nodding her head slightly. I can't be sure, but I think that she shed a tear as well.

We walk silently to the diner, and I open the door for her. It's quite dim inside, probably to prevent the customers from seeing the rat droppings. The neon sign lights up every two seconds or so, shooting the words "Hals Dinner" (grammatical errors and all) into the room in an annoying burst of lights. A man, who I presume to be Hal, comes sauntering over to our table. He eyes my wallet with a bit too much enthusiasm. I gingerly tuck it under my arm. I order quickly, making sure it's the most expensive thing on the menu, so she is not uncomfortable doing the same. However, I see her gaze momentarily sweep over the more expensive (12 dollars and up) menu section and then settle on the bottom right corner, which has the cheap cereals. After we order, we make small talk for several minutes.

I don't even
know her name,
and yet I feel I
know who she is.

Hal comes out of the kitchen and places the food before us. The woman's eyes light up as the aroma of her piping hot cereal overtakes her. She blows until it's cool and feeds her all too willing child, not once taking a bite herself. I nibble on my food and then push my plate towards her, claiming that I'm full. But she's doesn't reach for it. After a moment, I launch into the question I've been planning to ask her since I first noticed her trudging along with her baby. "I've been watching you for some time, and I need to know, why aren't you receiving any public assistance?"

She looks down at her baby, and says, "I . . . I, how did you know?" Before I can respond, she continues, her voice barely audible. "I live in constant fear that someone will take my baby away."

I look this woman in the eye. I don't even know her name, and yet I feel I know who she is. I tell her who I really am. I explain to her, "I would like to be in business with you. You will be my partner, and together we will help people who have been overlooked by the government, the forgotten masses." I give a triumphant breath and say, "We have a long journey ahead of us." She nods, a slight smile crossing her lips, still gripping her baby tightly.

The Unbreakable Oath

Tziporah Fink

She always knew that life was not fair, but she never expected that it could be so cruel.

Her memories felt so close, that if she just stretched out her hand she could touch them. But she did not want these memories anymore. She had not even wanted them to begin with, but as time had passed, she had started to forget. She became wrapped up in all the blessings G-d had given her since: her husband, a safe and comfortable home, and most importantly, her beautiful son. As she held that letter, with tears pooling in her eyes, the only thing she wanted to do with those thoughts was to shatter and abolish them from the face of the earth.

It was June 5, 1967 in the country known then as Palestine. She was 16 years old, sitting in her tenth grade classroom when the ground next to her went

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earth.

up in flames. She ran through the ashes and smoke and into the closest bomb shelter. She had known that this day was coming, but she was still paralyzed with fear when it came. She heard the screams of her fellow classmates as they, too, ran away from the burning building. She closed her eyes and made a promise: If she were to survive this war, and if G-d would grant the Jewish people a place that they could call their own once again, she would do anything to defend the soil, where she knew in her heart, she truly belonged.

The five days she lived in that shelter felt like five years. She replayed the oath that she made in her mind again and again, but the shelling did not stop. It seemed that no matter how much she prayed, her prayers seemed to soar up to heaven and plummet straight back down to earth, unanswered. At the moment when she was about to give up, there was total silence. A silence so loud that she heard it ringing in her ears. At that moment, all of the girls in bomb shelter knew that the war was over, that the darkness had ended, that there would be no more running through flames, smoke and ash. She knew that just when she had thought there was no hope, G-d had listened to her prayer and allowed the Jews to take control over the state of Israel.

After the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War, she kept her promise and supported the state of Israel at every available opportunity. At the same time, she got married, built a home and became a mother to her only son.

She remembered how she sat in the café where she first met her husband, and how they had laughed over the most ludicrous things. She recalled the day her son was born and how she had first heard him cry. She reminisced about teaching her son how to tie his shoes, eat with a fork and knife and ride a bike without training wheels. She thought of his sea green eyes, chocolate brown hair and the few freckles that sprouted over his nose in the summer sun. Her son meant everything to her because he was living proof that G-d had listened to her prayers on that day of darkness. She thought that it was impossible for anyone to take him away for her, and that she wouldn't give him away for anything in the world...until today.

Today she held the letter in her hands, knowing what it was without reading it. How could she forget her promise to G-d amongst all of His creations around her? How could she have forgotten her oath that was a symbol of her faith? Now G-d was sending her a message, to remind her of the oath which she thought was unbreakable.

Her only son was being drafted to the Israeli Army. He was going to experience the same things that she had when she was sixteen. She felt as if a chunk of her heart was being torn out of her chest. She couldn't bring herself to believe the truth that she held in her hands. Is a single letter all it takes to have her son taken away from her? Is a single letter all it takes for her to grab the opportunity of serving her country to the highest extent, but at the same time put her son through her very own memories, fears and nightmares?

Tears streamed down her face onto the paper, onto the words that triggered memories and broken promises.



Sleeping Beauty

By Michal Usher



Three Disney Villainesses

By Chaviva Hoffnung

I Love You More

By Leah Berger

The little girl with the uneven pigtails and the jean bandana that had flowers made of beads sat across from her grandmother at the round table. It was a Sunday, so of course the weekend tablecloth was out. The tablecloth was embroidered with delicate flowers, each one a different color. They used to always sit in that room. It was the best place in the whole house, according to the little girl. It was the brightest, happiest, sunniest room the girl had ever been in. It's where her family gathered for all occasions and it's where she went to just spend time with her grandparents. It was a room of serenity. It brought on a sort of peace of mind. The walls were windows, inviting the warmth in. Even the ceiling had a window: a window to the sky.

And so, like always, the little girl with the uneven pigtails and the jean bandana that had flowers made of beads sat down at the table and looked at Grandma with her big eyes. Grandma was already by the black cabinet doors when she asked, "D'you want something to eat?" The little girl bit the bottom lip of her smile and, in tiny movements, nodded her head up and down. Grandma pointed to the dark wire basket of fruit and said, "Pick the best one."

Everything was the best to Grandma. Grandma used to tell the little girl that everything in her life was the best. And when the little girl was really listening, and there was that moment of perfection, Grandma would gently say, "And for you too."

The little girl with the uneven pigtails and the jean bandana that had flowers made of beads would lean her head just a smidgen back and lift her hands just over head (because she was a tall girl already) and reach with her tippy toes for the dark wired basket. And she would always pick the best apple. The best apple was the one that was red and green swirled into one. Because Grandma liked red apples, and the little girl liked green apples, and even though Grandma never would tell her to take an apple to share, the little girl knew that her grandma would end up eating some of the apple. Not all, just a slice or two.

Grandma was at the edge of the counter. The part of the kitchen that was kind of part of the best room, but not really. Two curious eyes and ten little fingers peeped up on top of the counter. Grandma had two plastic cups out. The ones with the lines so that the little girl could tell her exactly where to stop. And grandma had two kinds of milk. Big girl milk and Grandma milk. Grandma milk wasn't really milk, but it tasted like milk, and a little bit like vanilla, but not like vanilla ice-cream because that would be silly. Grandma poured the milk into the little girl's cup to the tippy top line. Then she took her silver spoon that was just a little bit

bent and scooped some chocolate dust from the yellow box with the bunny rabbit on it. And she would twirl the spoon in the milk in a way that only grandmas can do. No matter how many times the little girl would try, her chocolate dust would never twirl the same way Grandma's did.

The little girl with the uneven pigtails and the jean bandana that had flowers made of beads sat down with Grandma.

"I wanna learn a new game," said the little girl.

"I knew you would finally get bored of Go-Fish," said Grandma.

The little girl laughed, "Yeah, the girls in my school like it, but it's boring. I want to learn..." The little girl put her right pinky between her teeth and thought "...Oh right, I want to learn Poker" she said.

Grandma smiled, like she always did, and said, "How about Spit?"

"What's Spit?"

"It's a game our family is really good at because we have fast hands."

The little girl's favorite card game became Spit. She always played that with Grandma, and it never got boring because sometimes she would win and sometimes Grandma would win. The little girl never did get to learn her grandma's favorite card game, Poker.

After a day spent like this, the little girl would get that special feeling that you can only get when you do all these things with your grandma.

The girl with the uneven pigtails and the jean bandana that had flowers made of beads became the girl with the funny braces and half-ponied hair. She would go to her grandparents' house, to the best room and talk for hours with Grandma. Grandma would smile the way she always did. The girl would get up and bring some cashews (the unsalted ones) on a napkin for her and Grandma to munch on. Then Grandma would say something like how beautiful her grandchildren are. Grandma would tell the girl about how she told all her friends how her grandchildren are the best. The girl would then try to get Grandma to do a puzzle with her or play a card game again, but she never quite succeeded. Instead, they would sit in the unlit den and look through photo albums on the narrow rectangular table. Grandma would sit on the couch and the girl would swivel on the office chair on the other side of the table. It wasn't the same as the best room, but that's where Grandma wanted to be. The girl would pull out the biggest, reddest albums

she could find and open them up on the narrow rectangular table. Grandma could talk forever about every photo and the girl could sit for almost forever and listen.

The girl didn't even notice that Grandma had changed. She didn't even notice that her grandma had dementia, because every time she would come, the girl would get that special feeling that she got before all the bad things came, the one you can only get when you do all these things with your grandma.

The girl didn't
even notice
that Grandma
had changed.

And when her daddy would come and pick her up, the little girl would give Grandma a squishy hug and a delicate kiss. And Grandma would do the same. And in those few seconds, the greatest warmth in the world sparked. And the girl would lean over to Grandma and blink her big eyes and tilt her head down just a bit and innocently say from her small smile, "I love you." Grandma would then lean right in front of the girl's nose and smile the way she always did and answer with the same warmth in her eyes: "Well I'm bigger, so I love you more."

Now, when the girl goes to the best room, it's different. The tablecloth with the pretty flowers isn't there and the windows don't seem as big. There isn't always fruit in the basket and the girl has to sit in the wrong chair, in her grandma's chair, right next to Grandpa. Everything seems frail, like it might break if you stay too long or you look too hard. The pictures on the walls all seem to be calling for her, missing her presence. But it's still the best room and sometimes, when it gets really silent and she starts to miss her too much, the little girl can hear her whisper, "I love you more."



My Hero and My Shero

by Renana Witty

My Dear Scarlett

By Yocheved Butler

You used to be a firebrand. See that magnolia bush yonder? It's wilting from the sun, like your fiery passion for life, and its pleasures compelled all to bend to your will.

See, that vase yonder on the mahogany table? It sparks my fondest memory of you, how, cat eyes flashing, you threw a china figurine at me because your knight in shining armor, Mr. Ashley Wilkes, refused to marry you. Not Ashley and not anybody else were meant for you, Scarlett. Only Rhett Butler. I know you'll regret this scene forever, and I will never let you forget it. Yet, I knew right then that we were meant for each other because our spirits governed our actions. Ashley tried to tell you that likes must marry likes, so why didn't you listen to your hero and leave him behind?

You were like a wild stallion or a young man feverish to fight, who doesn't know what's good for it but refuses to listen to others. But I do recall your listening to my sage guidance when I taught you not to conform to southern society. Really it wasn't teaching, it was influencing because you didn't believe in their ideals, so I just gave you a little push to rid yourself of them. The first time was when you agreed to dance with me at a fundraising ball for our Holiest Southern Cause, even though you were mourning for your hated husband of two months. Ha! As if you, who still had so much life left, would retire as a widow at age 17!

Dear Scarlett, Ellen's morals should have reined you to be steady and calm, giving and gracious, proud without arrogance. After every sin, you consoled yourself, saying, "I'll think about all this tomorrow." I'll wager all my gold that you can count on your fingers how many times this happened. Is your life better now that you've tossed Ellen's yoke of gentlewoman-hood off your slender shoulders, to single-handedly support your beloved plantation? Your father, Gerald O'Hara, taught you that land is the only thing of value. Thus you sacrificed everything, even yourself and your upbringing, to guard Tara from those terrible Yankee carpetbaggers. Ah, 'tis the Irish in you. And really, I admired your longing to guard the dusty earth and even helped you at times, but was it worth it?

When you needed money, your greed outgrew your conscience. You lied, cheated, stole...all to get rich. Sounds like me running the Yankee blockade to make a fortune instead of joining the war, but I did not have honor to lose or a reputation to ruin.

That lumber mill of yours sold inferior wood, claiming to be the best in Atlanta, and abused its convict laborers. Scarlett, I hoped to heaven you would give it up once you got rich; how lucky was I when this happened—you gave the

hopeless mill to Ashley when you'd promised me you wouldn't even include him in the project.

I know you married my money because love was reserved for Ashley Wilkes alone. You left none, even for your children. But sometimes I liked to think that really on the inside you knew the truth and the money was just an incentive. So, I bought you so many presents to bribe you to come back to me, but you always preferred Mr. Ashley Wilkes, the old-school gentleman. His high moral code prevented him from taking two wives but if it was up to you, Scarlett, only you would be the miserable one, as both he and I tried so hard to explain to you: likes can only marry likes.

Ha! As if you,
who had so
much life left,
would retire as
a widow at the
age of 17!

Ashley's sweet wife Melanie treated him like a king, just like Ellen. And look at their happy marriages. Ahem, Scarlett. But if you were a quiet angel, I would have paid you no mind, since I prefer my firebrand.

Melly is dead and Ashley is yours. Take him and go. Now all of a sudden you decide I am a better fit for you and you come running. But after all these years I've grown tired of waiting for you. I left you, but do not think that all is lost. Ellen taught you to be a great lady, but you pretended to be one just to catch a husband. I saw through you, but I married you because I hoped you would turn yourself around. I lost this bet, but I'm a gambler. I'll put in for another chance if you can show me that you have changed enough to truly come back to me. But it's only a spark, so nurture that light before it flickers out or I will never return to my little firebrand as...

Rhett Butler



Mona Lisa in Vogue

By Yael Cohen, Grade 12

Seeing Sideways

By Rachel Gozland

My maternal grandmother was 57 when her eyes, she says, started to lie to her. Driving down familiar roads, she started to notice that “the lines in the road seemed to go up and down.” The trees, she says, looked “like snakes.” She thought she was going mad.

No one really knew about macular degeneration 30 years ago, but it just so happened that the father of the ophthalmologist she visited had had the same disease. The doctor told my grandmother that there was bleeding from the veins at the back of her eyes—and that she was going to lose her sight.

“There are two kinds of macular degeneration,” my grandmother explains to me. Her red, curly boy’s haircut bobs up and down, up and down, as she speaks with her strong London accent. “There’s a wet kind, and there’s a dry kind. The dry kind develops slowly. The wet kind takes a year and a half—it goes immediately.”

She had the wet kind, but because it wasn’t a well-known disease. There was nothing to do about it except laser surgery, which would stop the bleeding. The surgery came at a price—in the form of residue scar tissue that inhibits vision.

Asked how she’s come to terms with her loss of vision, my grandmother says, matter-of-factly: “I’ve had to. I’ve stopped driving. Last thing I did was when I was driving, I saw the back of the car in front of me go up crooked, and I knew something was wrong.” Additionally, she was forced to quit her job as Office Manager at a Fortune 500 company on Wilshire Boulevard in West Los Angeles.

Macular degeneration impaired her central point of vision, and the chunky glasses she wears on a rope necklace around her neck don’t help much, but she can still see peripherally.

“Think of a picture in a frame,” my grandmother inhales slowly, as she struggles to find the right words to describe her condition. “You can’t see the picture, but you can see the frame. I can’t see direct. I kind of look sideways and I can recognize people. I used to do it really well, but now it takes a bit longer. I’m getting old, my dear.”

Bubby Hannah, with her pink cheeks and her flower-print sweater, is lacking in all degrees of height. Her eyes are a sea blue—an eye color that is common among victims of macular degeneration—and very wet, and they quiver and dart around. No matter. She holds me by the arms, and she looks into my eyes even though she can’t see them, and she smiles, and I smile right back.

She asserts that she was “lucky.” Her sight, she says, is foggy, but, in her words: “You learn to use what you have. There are some people who are com-

pletely blind! And I think it's fantastic what they do. I feel like I haven't really done much—when I think of all those people who are entirely blind.”

She hasn't learned Braille because it's not that easy. She didn't want to: “You know what I mean?” She fingers the letters of her gold Chai necklace, which rests just above her eyeglasses necklace. Books on tape from the library, she explains, are much easier, and by using these, she reads quite a bit.

She is legally blind, but she does not consider herself disabled. “My fingers have become sensitized to certain things,” she tells me. “If there's a mess on the kitchen counter, I'll tell you exactly where it is without looking,” she flaunts, teasingly.

I saw the back of
the car in front of
me go crooked,
and I knew
something was
wrong.

I ask her how she knits and crochets so flawlessly; she always seems to be turning out another round of baby blankets, shawls, and scarves every time I see her. “I count the stitches with my fingers,” she says. “Crocheting is different,” she explains. “It's done with a pattern, so you can feel when you've done a complete pattern.” Needlecraft is hardly my grandmother's only feat. Until

two years ago, she served as personal nurse to her husband, who suffered from Alzheimer's disease. She fed, bathed, dressed, and loved the man she first met at a London Jewish dance and whom she subsequently married in 1956.

She is also a mother of two, now a grandmother of seven, who takes her role as Bubby quite seriously. On her daughter's old bed, she keeps a collection of company, ranging from both Tom and Jerry to all of the Seven Dwarfs. She has a stash of chocolate in a crystal jar on the side-table in the living room, next to a duck in a yellow raincoat that does a “Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head” routine while twirling his umbrella and tapping his foot, and she occasionally hosts re-runs of Shirley Temple films in the TV room. Her little one story house is always well-kept, and the clock attached to the eternally drinking, all-too-happy, porcelain drunkard whistles on the hour.

At the end of our session, my grandmother thanks G-d for all she has. She makes a point of letting me know that she can still do plenty of things in the kitchen when nobody's around. And, just as I'm getting ready to leave, my grandmother makes an offhanded comment about coins, noting that the quarter and the dime have etched edges, while the penny and the nickel have plain edges...

Perhaps there is more to seeing than our eyes.

The Bomb Shelter

By Leah Genkin

Attention! Code red, code red! A rocket is heading toward Ashkelon! Get in the bomb shelters now! Repeat: Code red, code red!

What should I do? Okay. Calm down. Breathe. Everything will be just fine. I have to get us all to the bomb shelter in 15 seconds. Hurry up! What are you thinking, we're in danger! The kids are crying. I know I have to calm them but how can I if I myself am having a panic attack.

"Come on kids quickly let's go! We have to get to the bomb shelter! Don't worry; everything will be just fine." I sob.

"Ima, I'm scared," little Shainy cries.

"It's all going to be okay. We just have to get to the bomb shelter!" I plead hysterically.

Pbew! We made it to the bomb shelter. I hear the siren and rockets. How could anyone sleep in this noise! Eli is already snoring soundly. I ruffle his hair. It's ironic how babies can just forget about the troubles and forgive. A few minutes ago Eli was wailing loudly, and now he's sleeping without a worry in his mind. If only we were all like that. Then there would be no more fighting, nor wars. But that's just a dream--the world isn't like that. People don't forgive or forget.

Look at the Arabs, for example. Oh, why do the Arabs want to hurt innocent people? When is all this fighting going to come to an end? Help me! They can't expect us to live our lives like this, always running to bomb shelters, the kids missing so much school. Don't they understand? Maybe we should just leave Israel. NO! I can't do that; this is the Jew's Promised Land, and we'll be protected no matter what.

"Ima, what's happening outside? Where's Abba?" Shainy and Yoni ask in unison.

"Children, everything will be okay," I explain. "There are people who live in a place called Gaza, and they want us to leave Israel, so they are firing rockets at us."

Is this too scary for the kids to know? NO, they must know what's going on. They can't keep on running to the bomb shelters without knowing why.

"But Ima, where is Abba then?" they whisper.

"Abba is helping protect Israel from these bombs," I explain.

“Is he going to be okay?”

“G-d willing yes. Don't worry. Abba is helping stop these bombs from coming to us.”

The kids sit there quietly absorbing all this information. They're so mature for such a young age. They're not even four yet! They're not crying anymore. They're just sitting there quietly, understanding that they should behave. I feel so bad for them. When Yoni was only two he was already sharing. A 9-year-old boy came and took his toy away and Yoni didn't cry. He simply gave up that toy and went to find another toy to play with.

People
don't
forgive or
forget.

“Children, it's time to go to bed.”

“Okay.”

I kiss them on the head and tuck them in.

Oh, how I love these kids like crazy. If anything happens to them, G-d forbid, I don't know what I would do.

Where is my husband now? I hope he's okay. We all love him so much. Please protect him. I hope he comes home. When he came home late from work last week I was extremely worried. I thought something happened to him. When will I see him next? When will all this drama stop? I can't constantly be living my life in fear of rockets falling on us.

Maybe we should go to America for the time being. There, we'll be safe. But I can't leave my husband here alone, and besides, where will I get the money from? When will I have time to pack the kids? How will I let my parents know that I'm coming? The tickets must be really expensive because now so many people want to leave Israel. No, it's too hard to go to America. Ah...what should I do? It seems that to every solution there are more problems.

The sirens have stopped.

I really should go to bed now. Tomorrow will be a hard day. The kids will be bored out of their minds not being able to go outside and play with their friends. Lately I've been worrying so much. I'm so exhausted, my eyes are closing... Everything's getting dark...

I'll worry in the morning, for now I have to sleep.

Double Baggage

By Talia Alper

I see you every Tuesday evening, somewhere between the hours of 6:00 and 8:00. I would recognize you anywhere. It's that smile...

Most people get tired of waiting on line for me because I take a little longer than others when I work. They switch to a different line, they pretty much all do. But not you. You, you wait faithfully on my line, and you smile that smile at me and wish me a good night. You are so nice, and you don't even know it...

Because of this, and because you're a "regular," I try to give you special treatment. I trouble myself to give you both paper and plastic bags to ensure the safety of each item that you buy. I place each object into the bags with care, scrutinizing each item with an expert eye, taking in all the shapes and sizes, organizing them in a slow and systematic fashion. Then I place each double-bagged package into your cart as you pull through, and I watch as you sail through the sliding glass doors and out into the cold night air to load up your car. And that's it. I don't see you again for another week, until the next Tuesday evening...

But not this past Tuesday. I didn't go into work. See, when I got home on Monday evening, I started boiling up some potatoes to have with our dinner. And then Johnny came in. His face was white, and he was very quiet. I was scared because he's normally a very jovial character. He said he didn't want potatoes again. He claimed that was the only thing bothering him. He lied. He knew. I'm sure of it. Because the next morning, when I woke up, Johnny was gone. Not gone like he went out to town. Gone like he was just an empty body lying in the bed beside me. And that was it. No more Johnny.

I cried. I don't know how long. I just cried and cried until I could cry no more, and then I cried a little while longer. I thought my face would stay permanently wet and red and puffy. Then I called my son Henry. I cried while I told him. Henry tried to comfort me, but it was no use. Not even his most calming words, repeated again and again that we would be alright -- that Johnny was in a better place -- could comfort me. I just wanted my Johnny back.

The day was a blur of tears. I didn't call in sick to work. Henry did it for me. I didn't eat anything. Henry threw out all the food he had cooked for me. I didn't shower. Henry hung my towel back on the hook without saying a word. He hadn't said much all day, but neither had I. We were both in a state of shock, only we were coping in different ways: me with tears and Henry with silence.

That night Henry slept on the couch in the living room. I shuddered as I got into my chilly bed. Johnny's side was cold as ice. My last words to him kept echoing through my mind. He must have known, or else he wouldn't have made sure that the

last thing we said to each other was “I love you.” If he hadn’t known, he would have simply dozed off, just like every other night, while I droned on about something stupid, like Martha’s shoes or Samantha’s new dress. But I didn’t have time to think

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about that. I had to go to sleep. I had work the next day. If I took off again, I could get fired. And it would be good for me to go to work. It would keep my mind off of Johnny.

On Wednesday no one said anything about my absence on Tuesday. I wasn’t surprised. No one seems to really notice me anyway. So I just stood silently and did what I do every day. I put people’s food, drinks, and other odds and ends into bags. Some in paper, some in plastic. I thought about you. I missed you on Tuesday. Who had bagged your things for you? Maybe Martha. Maybe Samantha. Maybe Stephanie managed the register and did the bagging, but I doubt it. She’s not a very skilled bagger.

The ride home was a long and painful one. I sat on the smooth blue plastic surface of my seat on the bus and remembered for what felt like the thousandth time that day that I would be going home to an empty house, and that the house would stay empty.

When I got home, I went up to my room. I sat down on the bed, and I cried and cried and cried and cried.

I cried for my dear husband, Johnny, who was lost to me forever.

I cried for my poor son, Henry, who was now an orphan.

I cried for my beloved grandchildren, who would never get their tree-house built now that their grandpa was not here to build it with them.

I cried for myself, a lonely widow who would have to support herself and grow old all alone.

But there was only one thing that kept me going. That one thing was your reassuring smile, the smile that I knew I would see next Tuesday evening, when I would pack all of your items first into the brown paper bag, then into the yellow plastic bag. I await your smile and the chance to give my “regular” her special treatment, the special treatment of the double bags that you deserve so, so much, you’ll never know. You’ll never know. But I know you’ll never disappoint me, you and your smile.

A Day Old: Three Japanese Memories from

By Rivka Salhanick

I. The Tempura is Burnt: Early Morning

The tempura is always burnt now. Yes I's forgot... Kaede is cooking today. It is no good. Bad cooking is like bad "sumi-e": The wrong brushes will bring wrong result. Wrong bring wrong, and right bring right. One good eye bring two good eyes? Only in heaven.

I smell the tempura from my corner room. It is not far from the kitchen: only Kamiko's flowers and trees separating the rooms. Sometimes in the deep summer, when no wind blows the simmering fragrances away to the hills, I breathe, smell the vegetables cooking. The heat and smells row their way up the wood slats, sliding up the curves in the roofs. But today, the burnt is in the spaces of my nose. It is no spice, it is no good. But "If you do not enter the tiger's cave, you will not catch its cub." My young granddaughter Kaede, she needs a chance to try and fail, before she can bring success.

The burnt fumes will smother my cushions. They need to be cleaned soon anyway, and Kamiko will take much sweat and aches to remove the stench from my cushions and mats. My ears still bang a little from the beating of the mats yesterday. She is a "a superior child", a good daughter. Obedient and quiet, what would be the perfect wife. She was the perfect wife. Obedient and quiet.. Tempura does not stick, lump, burn, and claw to your throat, bringing coughing and phlegm for many hours. No, it flows, like the rafts... Like Isao, the strong male trunk of the rafts. Yes... Kamiko was a good wife. She has pictures... I have not seen them. Kaede, too, will be a good wife.

II. A Conversation with Kaede: Morning Meal

"Where is the tempura, Kaede?" I asked.

"On the stove, soba" she said.

I stare at her.

I am on one cushion and she on another, with the low table between us. I see only her white scalp, the line that separates the two streams of back hair. The tips of her glasses are glinting. She is doing schoolwork, scribbling. Her hand will be no good for painting or cooking. No good. My good eye sees the edges of her eyelashes that are curled together. Squinting is not good, not for a young girl. Make conversation, Kazumi.

"Kaede, your mother said you are doing well in school. You are memorizing letters well? Calligraphy is good," I said.

m the Aged

“No, soba. We learn history and sciences, and other things. We have American studies,” she said.

Oh.

“And soba, nobody needs calligraphy any more, you know,” she said. There is twinge of pepper, of heat in her voice.

My head is aching a little. I have noticed the changes of how Kaede acts: only homework. Just painting and cooking when Kamiko tells her. Then, it is no good. No good. It is burnt.

Wrong bring
wrong, and right
bring right. One
good eye bring
two good eyes?
Only in heaven.

“No Kaede. Calligraphy is good, painting is good. American is not right. They have bad things like... like rafts and... Kaede, ‘The stake that sticks out gets hammered down.’ It is not good, no good to be different,” I said.

Her childlike eyes turn to small furrowed holes that quickly disappear beneath the smooth hair. I cannot furrow deep enough. The pen starts to scribble. I heave my body to the stove and scrap the top of the pot, scrape out a bit of burnt tempura. My hands tremble slightly, and the top clatters to the earthen

floor. Ringing for seconds.

The pen hesitates for a second, and then renews its furious scribbles again.

No good.

III. The Maple Tree I Drew: Late Evening

After dusk, I returned to my room. The cushions are soft; Kamiko cleaned them well. My tired legs droop themselves over the slumped edge of the brown one. The burnt is still in the air, but the smell is less smoky, faint. But Kaede... Kaede is everywhere, in my mind. What Japanese wife will she be? My tired eyes turn toward the line of paintings on the wall, my paintings.

The rafts. Those were for Isao.

Gone.

And then, there are the delicate flowers, shaded in by a young Kamiko. She does well.

And then,...

Nothing.

What for Kaede? She does not like Japanese paintings, no. She will not like my rock garden. Gentle water streams, simple teahouses, dusky mountain tops in the very edge of the page, and many pebbles: gold, copper, green..... blue.....

No, she will not like.

My hands pass over the lamp that rests slightly tipped against the wall, over to the wicker box. The small knot slips open at my touch, revealing seven small bottles of paint, four brushes, and one piece of canvas. One piece left. My last artwork. It must be good. It must bring peace...

For many hours, I work, relighting candle after candle. After many hours, I sketch the last green leaf on the left edge of the canvas. Finally, I raise my eyes, and see the edge of a purple haze on the mountains. I turn back down to my wicker box, retrieved a purple bottle, and add a slight curl of purple on the edge of the mountains. There.

Blowing the paper slightly, I lay it carefully against the wall and shuffle backwards a few steps, squinting at the image.

Good.

I am finished.

I shuffle back to the cushions, lay my back flat, and pull the sheet up. My mind relaxes, the first time in many moons.

I have created an American maple tree. I saw a picture of one once, in Kaede's folder from school. Yes, she will like it. It is American. And it is a maple, a "Kaede."

No, American and Japanese. American tree, and Japanese history in purple.

On the corner of the paper, I write my name. Kazumi. "Harmonious beauty."

Good.

Generations

By Elky Melohn



I Will Only Come in Peace

By Tova Sobolofsky

She strikes the match, gradually lights the candles, and says the bracha (blessing). I gracefully enter this home without knocking because I know that I am welcome here.

She kisses the little girl in the polka dotted dress and darling pigtails, and she strokes the pacified baby boy in the green and white onesie. The daughter rubs her mommy's nose as they whisper "Good Shabbos" to each other. She skips off to play with her red-cheeked dolls as the mother tenderly places the infant in his swing. Finally, she can relax on the sofa and reflect back on her week. She stretches out her hand to reach the worn out siddur on the bookshelf. This siddur has obviously travelled down life with her because its pages are fighting to stick onto their binding. She starts davening and begins to wipe her tears: tears of joy, of thanks to Hashem for constantly bestowing blessing on her family.

Queens are
exalted,
honorable,
and definitely
don't tolerate
nonsense.

This home characterizes beauty, dignity, and royalty. It represents what every Jewish home should look like at the end of the week. My presence enhances the already peaceful and calm atmosphere. I promise myself that I will come back here because this reminds me of my home.

I wish I could say the same about their neighbors' home. Do they want me to come in? It's not really my choice. I need to go inside...

She tightens her snood and screams at her teenage daughter to fetch the matches from the cabinet. She grabs the matches from her daughter's hands and anxiously recites the bracha as she eyes her toddler sneaking out of the house. The mischievous little boy has realized that this is the perfect time for his escape because his mother is closing her eyes.

"Please come inside now. It's too dangerous for little boys like you to be playing outside alone," she says, snatching her child up.

"Mommy, I am a big boy! I know how to be very mean to robbers," he replies. He sticks out his tongue and roars.

The baby is wailing inside because he hasn't been fed for a few hours. She reaches to pick him up out of his cluttered playpen. She fiercely mixes ingredients together for a bottle and, at the same time, tries to set the table. After a haphazard

job, she rushes to change out of her robe into Shabbos attire. On her way upstairs, she sees her daughter sprawled across the couch reading the latest magazine.

“You don’t have anything else to do? Can’t you help out a little bit? You see how I’m trying to juggle everything...” She pleads with her apathetic daughter.

I can’t handle the tenseness in this home. Perhaps, the situation in this house will shape up when her husband comes home; I pray that it does. But for now, I must leave and go back to their neighbor’s home...

She hears a faint knocking and slowly stands up to open the door. By this time, the little girl is trying to read her baby brother a book as he dozes off in his swing. If it wasn’t Shabbos, this delightful scene would be a picture for their baby albums.

“Good Shabbos, Mommy,” her reserved husband in the straight wide-rimmed black hat says as he enters the cozy home.

“So nice to see you back from shul,” she answers as she flashes a smile back at him. “Hello, Yaakov. How was my big first grader in shul?” She winks at their five year old son who trails behind the father.

The father and son remove their coats and make their way towards the table. The table is elegantly set with cream colored porcelain china, glasses, and gold silverware. The family sits down to sing Shalom Aleichem, followed by Kiddush and a wholesome, enjoyable Shabbos meal.

I feel like I am an invisible member of this family because they behave as if they are in a palace. It makes me feel right at home. However, I had better check in on their neighbors’ house. I would rather not look, but it is my duty...

The husband and his two rowdy sons barge through the door without even a small knock.

“Mommy, where are you? We’re starving!” The older of the two sons wails impatiently.

As the mother descends the staircase, it sounds like an earthquake.

“Ok, everyone please sit down at the table. Then, we can start,” the mother says, sighing heavily.

The husband speeds through Kiddush so that they can bring the food out quickly.

“How was your week, children?” She tries to lighten up the apprehensive mood of her family.

They are trying. I can tell that they don't like being stressed. I will give them time because deep down, they want my presence to shine in their home. They want me to be a part of their Shabbos the same way that I am an integral part of their neighbors' Shabbos.

Queens are exalted, honorable, and definitely don't tolerate nonsense. I am only comfortable when the people around me are living in tranquility. Because I am a queen. And not, just any queen. I am the Shabbos queen and Hashem will only let His queen enter in peace.

I look forward to the day when I will feel welcome in every Jewish home.

The Woman I Am

By Devorah Shteiroman

