

A TIME GONE BY

Oh, those streets of America paved with gold! How they beckoned to my mother and father at the turn of the century.

To my mother they offered an escape from the hard work and lack of opportunity in a small town in Poland. Some mystery is attached to my father's reasons for leaving Russia, and it ranges from stories that he was a playboy fleeing from the authorities to one that, as a Jew, he was running away from a seven year conscription in the Russian Army. Actually, none of us ever really learned the true story!

By saving penny by penny, they accumulated the fare for passage to America. They were able to survive the torturous trip across the ocean in crowded, smelly, steerage quarters because they were sustained by visions of splendor in the Promised Land. Unfortunately, the golden dreams soon became commonplace reality, for they encountered hardships in order to make a livelihood. Low wages, long hours of work awaited them.

So, on the streets of New York, these two people were introduced by a mutual friend. After a short courtship, they were married. At this point I should write that they lived happily ever after. But this isn't fiction, it is an autobiography.

There was a belief, many years ago, in Jewish life that Polish Jews (called Glitzianes) and Russian Jews (called Litvaks) should

A Excellent

Excellent opening

Excellent

FLORENCE BARD
MRS. LIVINGSTONE

fine sentence

never marry. It wasn't a feud in the Hatfield and McCoy tradition, but a folk belief passed on from family to family. The above proved true for my mother and father, for it was a stormy marriage, but during the lulls five children were born.

Many stories regarding the hardships both of my parents endured in this new country were told to my brothers and myself. My father told us of the long, hard hours of work he encountered as a fruit and vegetable trucker, since he had to rise in the early hours of the morning and drive with horse and wagon to the market in order to purchase his wares. Although he was a slight man, he often lifted hundred pound crates of vegetables and fruits. My mother's tales related the drudgery and problems she encountered by living in a cold water flat, and the trials and tribulations of raising five children, who incidentally were all born at home.

There were some good times, I am sure, during those years of our growing up. However, I barely recall them. The struggle and bleakness of their lives have remained etched in my memories.

A few faded photographs are all that are left of my parent's backgrounds, since they were the only members of their families to come to America. My brothers and I never met our grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins since they remained in Poland and Russia. Unfortunately, all were either wiped out by Hitler's armies or contact was lost with our Russian relatives.

FLASHBACKS

*Very good
incidents are
well chosen*

If I were to attempt to write a scenario covering my formative years, it would be full of episodic scenes. It is very difficult for me to write in detail about my childhood, due to a partial mental blackout, but various portions of my younger years still remain with me.

I now live in a modern four and-a-half room apartment with two bathrooms. It is a far cry from my birth which occurred in the small bedroom of a cold-water flat. From stories which my mother related to me, I can visualize the three room apartment in which we lived, my parents and five children, which was dominated by the coal stove, the only source of heat and hot water.

*Harbinger
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A*

Our next move was to a more luxurious apartment, which faced the elevated tracks of the Culver Line subway. Although it took quite some time to become accustomed to the regular throb of train wheels outside of our window, we still enjoyed the thrill of having heat from radiators and hot water from the spigots.

good

A few years later as our finances improved, we were installed in a two family house, with approximately three bedrooms. Most of our furniture consisted of beds, in which my brothers and I usually slept by two's. There was a large round table in one of the rooms, which not only was utilized for the eating of meals, but which was the hidden repository of racy magazines belonging to

*From
incident
to relate*

my brothers. On the few occasions when everyone was away from the house, I could stealthily creep below the table, snatch a few magazines and gaze upon them with wide, unknowledgeable eyes.

Since I had a younger brother, I was the unpaid babysitter for him. Much against my will, I would drag him to the local movie house, and we prepared for these excursions by "bagging" it. In our brown bags was enough food for a day's outing, because we spent hours in the interior of the theater. We sat through cartoons, serials, two main features, and perhaps a repeat. When we finally burrowed our way out of the darkness, we left behind enough garbage to challenge the South Bronx!

Perfect

A major event in my childhood was my Hebrew graduation at the age of twelve, when I was the valedictorian. Before a capacity crowd in the synagogue, I delivered a fifteen minute speech in Hebrew which, unfortunately, only the Rabbi and I understood. At the conclusion, I was greeted with deafening applause, but I do not know who was happier at that point, me or the audience!

I recall one of our Hebrew teachers, who was verbally tortured by the boys in my class. Her name shall always be remembered by me, because since it was Mrs. Whitcup, the boys made it rhyme with a word starting with an S, and called her by that name when her back was turned.

REMINISCENCES

Your selection of incidents is excellent

Some people are blessed with total recall. Others, like myself, have difficulty recalling incidents which occurred during our childhood.

A few occurrences shine through the haze. In those days, and really it wasn't the B.C. era, summer camps were readily available only to the wealthy. As a result, our occasional trips to Coney Island in Brooklyn during the summertime were highlights. Before we embarked on these excursions, the entire family had to enter into certain preparations. My mother, who usually went on these trips with three or four of her small children, prepare picnic lunches sufficient for an army. These, plus an array of drinks, sand pails, towels, etc. were carried by all of us. Since bathhouses were also not available to us, not because of discrimination but because of the cost, we all put on our swim suits under our regular clothing.

of course really see this! happens

The entire troop would then board the trolley car, which I hope some of you still recall, and off to Coney Island we would go!

On one of these occasions, when I was about four or five years of age, I wandered away from my family and became lost. In that sea of humanity, I could not find my mother or brothers, and some one turned me over to a beach policeman. He carried me in his arms to the Children's Shelter on the beach. There were other children who joined me in my wailing, but slowly parents arrived and rescued them, with one exception... me! After a few hours, I was transferred to the police station, when finally toward evening my frantic mother arrived. I was told by her that the police kept sending her from one place to another, until she finally located me. My day on the beach was not a gay merry-go-round!

Another remembrance which shines out in the fog was my occasional trips to the synagogue with my father. I later learned that it was not so much from piety that my father spent so much time in the synagogue, but it was a harbor away from home where constant problems of a somewhat nagging wife and five children were not visible. Somehow I do not recall the religious services that clearly, but one of the major spots in the synagogue remains in my mind...that was the men's urinal. I do not know how I found that particular spot, but that porcelain fixture fascinated me...possibly, because I could not figure out how they could do it standing up!

perfect

There is an expression which is prevalent now..JAP(Jewish American Princess). In my brothers' eyes, that figure of speech was non-existent. I recall numerous pillow fights with some of my brothers, and many times I was the loser. I do not remember it too clearly, but my mother used to tell me that when my youngest brother was born, I exhibited my sibling jealousy by rocking him so hard in his floor cradle, that he fellout! That was one way of getting rid of a younger brother.

→ something that is not too unusual

Occasionally my father would try to amuse his brood, and his way of doing it was to take his false teeth out of the cup in the closet and make faces with them. My father had one tooth in his mouth, but hated his false teeth. They only appeared in his face at weddings or bar-mitzvahs, otherwise back in the closet they went. How he managed to eat meat meals consisting of hard steak, etc. with one tooth in his mouth has never been made clear to me, but he must have had some expertise in order to accomplish this.

We were a family of seven living in three or four rooms with a coal stove for warmth. Despite the lack of modern conveniences we managed to survive, and sometimes I tend to think that these hardships helped prepare us for the future since the "depression" was just around the corner.

FLORENCE DAKS

CHAPTER IV

THE THREE R's-

'READING, 'WRITING, & 'ARITHMETIC

Vivid and clear - a fine paper.

My first day at school could be called "A River of Tears". This downpour may have been partially caused by my belief that I was being abandoned by my mother at the school's entrance, but there was a more obvious cause ~~of~~ for my anguish - my lack of hair!

Six years old, you say, and no hair! Yes, and let me hasten to explain this situation. Since I had unmanageable, thick bushy hair, my mother had taken me to the barber shop for a haircut, and he had ruthlessly cut and cut, until the final result was a "boyish bob" haircut.

This may have been the fad at that time, but as I gaze at an old photograph of myself at that age, I see a sad face because, as a result of the close cut, I look like a boy. Needless to say, my fellow students in the first grade were a bit puzzled as to my correct identity, and when it was determined that I was a girl, the boys took advantage of the situation by making fun of me.

I surmounted this trauma by attempting to fade into the woodwork of the classroom. I assumed this pose for quite a number of years, and except for the times when the teachers would ferret me out, I spoke no evil, heard no evil, saw no evil. I did my homework, passed my grades, and except for that obnoxious subject "arithmetic" I survived.

Excellent paragraph

The words "algebra" and "geometry" send shivers down my spine, not of delight but terror. And to this day, numbers are not an ally of mine... but I must admit that I have mastered it to a point where I can enter a supermarket and cope!

Since I enjoyed reading a great deal, English classes were not a bore. The exception was Shakespeare, and he remained a mystery to me until I finally saw "Othello" enacted on the stage with Paul Robeson in the title role. The glory of his writing then became apparent to me.

I had a love affair in my Chemistry class.. a one sided and silent one. The teacher was Mr. O'Brien, in his twenties, tall, and handsome. I used to gaze at him with dreamy eyes, but my mind was not involved with formulas but just with chemical reactions involving the two of us. Alas, outside of him, I only recall very little of the subject which he taught.

well put

Do you know the "Gettysburg Address"? I do, because memorizing poems, historic speeches, etc. were a part of the school curriculum. When I visited Lincoln Memorial recently and saw some of those lines etched into the granite walls, I strongly resisted the impulse to stand in front of that honorable President and recite it to the tourists standing by.

I know the feeling

Today's newspapers advise us that there is strong sentiment to return to the 3 R's, because of the failure of students to read and understand the various subjects taught to them. Once again we come full circle to methods utilized in the past.

"WAS I A TEENAGER?"

As with all your papers, you capture each moment perfectly. Fine introduction!

When someone mentions the world "teenager", I envision an awkward half child-half woman, experimenting with hair-dos, make up, gossiping about boys, both fearfully and hopefully wishing to be grown up.

My teenage years were spent in an atmosphere ~~far removed~~ ^{in which} ~~from the one pictured above.~~ There was no time for ~~such~~ frivolities, for our family was more concerned with the main theme of our existence, rent and food bills. Since my father was ill with cancer and unable to work, my mother relied upon the income brought in by her four older children.

We all had part time jobs. Two brothers worked mornings before school began, and then returned to their jobs in the afternoon. I used to work in my brother's combination radio repair and bookstore, where I spent many afternoons assuming the role of the main, and only, clerk. All the monies which I would have earned automatically were given to my mother for household expenses. The word "allowance" had not entered our vocabulary.

As a result of spending so many years in my brother's various stores, I indulged in my main hobby and escape...reading! I could delve into many varieties of books, ranging from current fiction to those dealing with that forbidden subject "SEX". What an education I absorbed in those bookstores. Of course I never discussed the contents of those volumes with anyone, for

they were "verboten" subjects. Although I avidly read the many pages, particularly the sex manuals, I must admit that I never understood most of them. One book stands out in my memory- "Sexual Practices and Aberrations". Those aberrations, how they horrified and yet tantalized me!

Any juvenile desires for spending money were rarely satisfied. In fact I recall one particular episode when I expressed a strong desire to go to the Paramount Theatre in New York City with some friends. When my mother indicated that she had no money for such foolish wants, I dramatically threatened to throw myself out of the window. My mother, a knowing and stolid individual, did not yield to this threat, and I could not summon up enough courage to commit the dastardly deed.

I have a son, and when he entered those "terrible years" of teenhood, it was my first encounter with that tumultuous period. Although we both emerged somewhat scarred, I like to think that my husband and I were sensitive enough to assist him in that period of growth. But when I am in the company of teenagers, or find myself viewing them from a distance, to me they seem like creatures from another planet, one which I never inhabited.

FLORENCE DAKS

CHAPTER VI

RUTH, A FREE SPIRIT

✓ Excellent

When I first met Ruth, my first impression was of her rather slight figure, and her lack of good looks. Yet, when she started to speak, I was captured by her vocal imagery. When we became good friends, her verve and search for beauty introduced me to a new world of sight and sound.

Here I was... twenty-two years of age...unmarried, a solid, rather boring, working girl. ^{My friend Ruth} She opened up the doors of the prison into which I had jailed myself, and brought me out into the sunshine of the world. She introduced me to a kaleidoscope of fun and games... the magic of ballet, theatrical plays, trips to Cape Cod. And her sometime "oddball" friends ranging from homosexuals to intellectuals also colored this picture.

will state

And when, in the early 1950's she approached me with the mad idea of taking a six week tour through Europe, my sane middle class self recoiled. Why no "nice Jewish girl" takes off for Europe! What would my mother say? Needless to say I cannot print what my mother said, but somewhere a flame was illumined, and I agreed to go. With much trepidation I removed my life savings of \$600.00 from the bank, and off we went for six weeks in Europe.

terrific

Our sunny seven day journey on a small freighter brought us to the ruins of Rotterdam, due to the bombing during world war II. We embarked and visited other cities in Holland, France, Belgium and Switzerland. Due to the gaiety and zest with which we approached this new experience, my memories to this day are vivid with the beauty and sights of Europe.

Our friendship unfortunately came to an end when I later married. The sort of relationship we had required two unencumbered souls, and mine was now attached to another.

Some months ago after not speaking to Ruth for almost twenty years, during a moment of looking back at memories I found myself looking for her phone number. When I introduced myself, once again she and I re-entered our old world as though there had not been any separation at all. We ended our conversation with the promise that we would meet for lunch soon. That day has not come as yet. Somehow I fear it may never come to pass, because she is still a free spirit and I have become an inhabitant of another world.

"TO BE, OR NOT TO BE"

When I was a high school student, it was more or less accepted by my parents that I would enter the teaching field. There were usually two occupations open to girls at that time - teaching or secretarial work. Since I was a rather good student, and kept my nose to the educational grindstone, my parents decided this was my goal.

Teachers were respected, teaching was a steady occupation, and there was security for the future. I do not recall questioning this direction, for in my teen years I was a compliant child. The adolescent rebellion was delayed until much later on in life.

Due to my father's death and our financial straits, thoughts of my going to college were abandoned. Instead I enrolled in secretarial school, and shortly thereafter I began to work in an office. Frankly if circumstances had permitted me to continue with my college studies, I am not too sure I would have been a very capable teacher. Patience and fortitude were some of my virtues, but my leadership quality at that time was lacking.

Although I have been employed as a secretary for many years, and find satisfaction in it, there has been a secret yearning for something which would be more stimulating. Now I feel that if I had a degree, I would enjoy teaching young children, for age and experience have instilled greater confidence within me.

As a substitute, some years ago I started to enroll in college courses, and this I have found to be immensely satisfying. I have taken courses ranging from Psychology to Economics, and have been accumulating a small number of college credits. Frankly I find myself boasting to some of my relatives the number of credits I now possess.

phased well

Sometimes when I am struggling with an assignment, I question myself as to why I have subjected myself to this added toil. Why not throw in the towel, and try mah-jong? But when I finally complete the report, there is a sense of satisfaction that tossing ivory cubes around will never bring.

Thanks to a supportive and cooperative husband, I go forward. Who can tell - I might still walk down that aisle to receive my B.A., and that would bring me great joy.

the tone is perfect

I'm sure you will like the pretty work you have done for this course. Leads me to believe you will get your wish.

FLORENCE DAKS

CHAPTER VIII

YESTERDAY IS TOMORROW

It was while I was climbing a sand dune last week, with the wind lashing at my face, that I faced the ultimate truth. I was struggling to reach the top, when suddenly a young vacationer who was striding behind me passed me by, and effortlessly ran up the dune. Laughingly I looked at him, and muttered "Oh, to be twenty years younger". But obstinacy prevailed, and with movie-like visions of Cary Grant conquering the Sahara, I too made it to the top. Victory was mine!

The yesterdays have gone by so quickly. I must admit that now, more than ever, I realize that life is not eternal. Change is not that simple to achieve- it just takes a bit more effort.

And there have been many changes in my life. I too have not accomplished the goals I had outlined for myself and my family. But with age came reasoning, and the realization that these goals were those fashioned by others. So change became inevitable, and while some were painless, others took some courage to attain.

I like to believe that before the women's Liberation movement took hold, that I initiated my own liberation. But this would not have been possible without the wonderful assistance of my husband ~~and others~~.

Before you conclude that I am an octogenarian, and reveling in the years gone by, please remove that dismal picture from your mind. I am not quite ready to accept that rocking chair!

I refuse to accept the candles on my birthday cake. I want to see, smell, touch, read, taste much that is new to me. And so, when

Conversations
for Paul

my next birthday approaches, I have decided to gather up all the candles, and toss them out. The future is yet mine!

Perfect ending