

A LITERARY AND ART ANTHOLOGY

# The Day I Learned



PRODUCED BY THE ENGLISH, ART AND TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENTS OF  
MANHATTAN HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS • FEBRUARY 2014



# The Day I Learned

An Anthology of Literature and Art

Manhattan High School for Girls  
February 2014



*“Tell me and I forget.  
Teach me and I remember.  
Involve me and I learn.”*

*- Benjamin Franklin*



# 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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# The Day I Learned

*An Anthology of Literature and Art*

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*Dedicated to the ones we learned from first,  
our beloved parents*



# Table of Contents

Foreword . . . . .	20
On “The Day I Learned...”	
By Mrs. Meaghan Singer, Literary Advisor . . . . .	23
My True Identity	
by Chayla Friedman, Editor. . . . .	26
What a Hero is	
By Chevi Jacobson . . . . .	28
Homeless in the Night	
by Tikva Nabatian. . . . .	29
Driving Beneath the Surface	
by Talia Alper . . . . .	32
The Polish Rabbi’s Great Grandson	
by Chaya Sara Oppenheim . . . . .	34
To Improvise	
By Chayla Friedman. . . . .	38
The White, White Walls	
by Shoshana Lipsius. . . . .	39
That Disabilities Aren’t Inabilities	
By Racheli Goldberg . . . . .	41
From Nothing to Everything	
by Dafna Stern . . . . .	42
My (Dis)ability	
by Shoshana Rosenthal . . . . .	44
Someday, Together	
by Draisy Friedman . . . . .	47
To Dance In The Rain	
By Devorah Silverman . . . . .	50
To Touch the Sky	
by Shalva Gozland. . . . .	51
The Scribe’s Son	
by Avigayil Rosensweig . . . . .	53
That Everyone Can Learn To Read	
By Shayna Strum . . . . .	55
The Power of Love	
by Ava Katz, Editor. . . . .	58
That I Can Do It, Too	
By Nechama Buchen . . . . .	60
From Dark to Light	
by Elena Abraham. . . . .	61

Hidden Heroes	
by Estee Gerber . . . . .	63
How to Bake a Birthday Cake	
by Hadassa Herskovich . . . . .	65
To Break Free	
By Henya Areman. . . . .	68
The Sparkling Witness	
by Leah Bertram. . . . .	69
Bob's Conundrum	
by Miriam Schuster . . . . .	71
A Universal Language	
By Miri Fried . . . . .	73
One is not JUST One	
by Leah Steinberg . . . . .	74
Untied	
by Gabrielle Hawk. . . . .	76
My Grandmother's Pearls	
by Baila Schuster . . . . .	78
To Be Brave	
by Tamar Skydell, Editor . . . . .	82
Not To Cry	
By Rivka Schuster . . . . .	84
Broken Glass Can be the Clearest	
by Sara Ben-Zvi . . . . .	85
The Exodus	
by Miriam Liebling . . . . .	87
The Azuretti Struggle	
by Ava Katz . . . . .	89
To Read	
By Miriam Schuster . . . . .	90
The Princess and the Dragon	
by Meryl Rubin . . . . .	91
Living as a Traitor, Dying as a Hero	
by Esther Rothman . . . . .	93
To Hope for Peace	
By Miri Fried . . . . .	95
The Last Moment	
by Ayelet Buchen . . . . .	96
Walk a Mile in Ruby's Shoes	
by Bryna Greenberg. . . . .	98



That Words Can Kill	
By Sarah Shutyak . . . . .	.101
To Embrace Life	
by Matti Fuld, Editor . . . . .	.104
To Tell Time	
By Ava Katz . . . . .	.106
The Most Patient Shadow	
by Nechama Dembitzer. . . . .	.107
The Passage of Time and Torches	
by Aliza Lobell . . . . .	.109
That Age Doesn't Fade Beauty	
By Rachelle Chechik. . . . .	.111
Close your Eyes and See	
by Sarah Farber . . . . .	.112
Chameleon	
by Dina Rochel Blumenthal. . . . .	.115
One Dusty Old Book	
by Rivka Salhanick. . . . .	.117
Everlasting	
by Dini Raskin. . . . .	.120
To Broaden My Horizons	
By Mindy Hirsch . . . . .	.123
Letters to Her Brother	
by Shalva Adler . . . . .	.124
Fear	
by Shayna Strum, Editor . . . . .	.128
I Was Homeless	
By Hendel Seif . . . . .	.129
Breathe	
by Michal Cohen . . . . .	.130
To Draw Not What I See, But What I Know It Can Become	
By Atara Samuels . . . . .	.131
Ich Bin Nit Kein Berliner (1963)	
by Rivky Kreiser. . . . .	.132
I Can	
By Leah Berger . . . . .	.134
Dark Rainbow	
by Rachel Klamen . . . . .	.135
To Overcome Adversity	
By Leah Garrin . . . . .	.136

The Number Game	
by Atara Huberfeld . . . . .	.137
On Line	
by Hannah Balasiano . . . . .	.139
To Pay in Full	
by Gabriella Englander . . . . .	.141
I Was No Longer a Child	
by Shira Hein, Editor . . . . .	.146
To Raise My Hand	
By Yaffa Jacobson . . . . .	.147
The Firing of Ms. Wilson	
by Tirza Lehrfeld . . . . .	.148
Stolen Youth	
by Devorah Pinczower . . . . .	.150
I Learned With My Dad	
By Avigayil Rosensweig . . . . .	.152
The Day I Learned What the Color Orange Was	
by Chaviva Hoffnung . . . . .	.153
To Appreciate Solitude	
By Sharony Polinsky. . . . .	.155
Time to Be a Grown Up	
by Avigayil Karasick . . . . .	.156
When the Old Set In	
by Chayala Friedman . . . . .	.158
Yellow	
by Tamar Skydell . . . . .	.160
We Must Remember	
By Michal Cohen . . . . .	.162
Leaving Johnny Behind	
by Adina Feder . . . . .	.163
To Communicate in Silence	
By Orya Abraham . . . . .	.165
To Listen To My Voice	
by Rivka Salhanick, Editor . . . . .	.168
To Write	
By Yaffa Jacobson . . . . .	.170
<i>Calvin and Hobbes</i> and a Plate Full of Cookies	
by Ahuva Forman . . . . .	.171
Speaking of Moving On	
by Tova Schwartz . . . . .	.173

To Ride The Waves	
By Dena Skydell . . . . .	.176
A Season and a Sentence	
by Sheindel Rusanov . . . . .	.177
How To Learn	
By Miriam Liebling . . . . .	.179
True Colors	
by Hadassah Penn. . . . .	.180
We All Start Off Curious	
By Devora Kayla Pomrantz . . . . .	.183
Around the Classroom in A.D. Days	
by Sharony Polinsky. . . . .	.184
Impulse: Don't Purchase	
by Chani Weiner. . . . .	.186
Silent to the World	
by Rachel Retter. . . . .	.189
That Courage Can Bring Hope	
By Shifi Shulman . . . . .	.191

# Foreword

Like in an airport on an overlay, they lay in their chairs with their legs stretched out sloppily in front of them, their arms dangling by their sides like limp pipe cleaners. Some were doodling, some were picking at their cuticles, some were massaging their jawline and some were transfixed to an obscure spot on the ceiling. One girl looked catatonic. Her neck was twisted back and her eyes were cross-eyed. One girl was braiding and unbraiding the girl in front of hers hair. Shirlie was fast asleep, her mouth open in an o, her hands stuffed into her sweatshirt pockets, her name blasted in big red letters across her chest.

I watched the teacher from the back of the room. She swayed back and forth as she read from the history book on her desk. The chapter was about the Industrial Revolution and she read about the conditions in the factories, the politics of the time, and the rise of the middle class. In one hand she held a stub of chalk, in the other a crumpled tissue.

The bell rang, and the comatose classroom suddenly crawled back to life. Kids stretched and yawned over their locker doors and lazily slung their backpacks on. Shirlie stood in a tree position and Rachel did leg lifts against the wall, her little pleated plaid skirt flapping like a bird's wings. Most were headed for the door.

Mrs. Wilter swayed on, a boat drifting on in the empty sea. Then she looked up, sighed and shoved the tissue into her blazer pocket. She placed her book into her tattered leather attaché case.

“Young lay-dees,” she sang in her melodious voice. “Have a very sweet day, my sweet lay-dees,” she greeted, exiting the classroom.

“You, too,” some chirped. “Have a wonderful afternoon, Mrs. Wilter.”

The girls stepped to the side to make room for their teacher. I noticed that they exuded distinct respect for her.

Vexed, I stopped to ask. I wanted to understand their rudeness during the lesson. “Disrespect Mrs. Wilter? Us? Never,” one girl, quite the mayor type, explained. “We don’t ever talk while she’s teaching. We are so

quiet—nobody makes a peep.” The red-haired girl added, “And nobody even leaves the room, not even to the bathroom.” “Yeah,” offered another. “Nobody even eats or drinks in her class. Her husband was a war veteran.”

If only you’d focus, you could learn some history and get what’s going on in this world is what I wanted to suggest, or demand. Your teacher is a scholar. You’ll never know what she knows. But who was I to chastise them—after all, I was but a visitor, a guest in their home.

I thanked the girls and headed to the faculty room, the imagined banter cackling in my head: Kids nowadays; they cannot gauge quality—what—with all the new technology around, you expect them to focus? You think what the books have to say matters to them? What, are we going to run an entertainment house—maybe I should stand on the desk and dance for them? Don’t you worry. One day they will look back and appreciate a substantial lecture. You’ll see.

One day.

Back in the car on my way home, the scene fills my mind and I am there with them as I try to read the flight board—but my eyes are blurry and I can’t stop yawning. It is chilly and my neck is stiff and my mind keeps repeating the same dumb phrase over and over again. The flight is delayed. The flight is delayed. The flight is delayed. If only we could just board the plane and stow our bags overhead and fasten our seatbelts and listen to the safety announcements and eat snacks and then watch the map and the mileage move on the little screen.

But, no. The flight is delayed and we will not take off now.

I see the catatonic girl. Her neck is twisted back and her eyes are cross-eyed.

The flight is delayed. The flight is delayed. The flight is delayed. We will not take off now. But we w

One day.

The day I visited Mrs. Wil  
requirement is the day I learned  
not in an hour, not when we gr

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Friedman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal tail stroke.

THE DAYI

# On “The Day I Learned...”

By Mrs. Meaghan Singer, Literary Advisor

The day I learned to “throw out my script” was back in September. It was the day I was going to pitch this year’s Literary Journal theme to the other teachers on the committee. Ms. Friedman and I had spoken at length about a possible theme back in July, and we were very excited to reveal our brilliant idea to the others. I walked into the room quite confident (nay, cocky), asked for a “drum roll, please!” and then.....crickets. A few coughs. One or two “Um...I don’t know”’s.

I was stunned. Ms. Friedman looked at me from across her desk, smiled and said something to the effect of: “See, Meg. We plan and G-d laughs.” How right she was.

The committee and I spent the next 40 or so minutes putting our heads together to come up with a different theme, and (if I am honest) perhaps a better theme. Our meeting was truly collaborative, as all good learning is. We worked together—we learned from one another. And the result is this year’s journal, “The Day I Learned...”

This collaborative process continued over the coming weeks and months, as we embarked on the massively daunting journey of putting together the journal itself. The journal would not have happened had Mrs. Weiss and Mrs. Friedman not inspired their students to create such beautiful artwork. It would not have happened had Ms. Friedman and I not pored over each and every prose entry, editing each piece countless times. It would not have happened had the student editors not given up so much of their time and talent to edit each piece and write such poignant literary criticisms for each section of the journal. It would not have happened had Adeena Lisker not been kind enough to photograph all of the artwork. And it certainly NEVER would have happened had Miss Stefansky not generously volunteered to use her In Design skills to lay out the journal in its entirety.

Life rarely goes the way you plan it. And thank G-d for that. If back in September my colleagues had blindly nodded their heads in assent at the theme I had suggested, you would be reading a very different book right now. You wouldn’t be seeing the same lovely artwork or reading the same striking prose. Essentially, you wouldn’t be viewing the learning process at its best.

Enjoy the collaboration,

Mrs. Singer

THE DAYI



# 1

Section

## My True Identity

# My True Identity

by Chayla Friedman, Editor

When do we claim an identity, a single mark of ownership over ourselves? Becoming something, someone, is perhaps the strongest aspiration a human being can have. We are coined by age, eye color and our surroundings—traits of our lives that give us a sense of belonging in an otherwise nameless world. But identity is a deeper creature that exists in increments, slowly shedding and revealing new fragments as time creeps by.

Tikva Nabatian, author of “Homeless in the Night,” describes the day Fire (personified) discovers its true nature. “I could hear them all howling my name into the otherwise silent night. ‘Fire!’” Tikva weaves mystery into her piece as she describes the wreckage of a burning house scorched by a personality still unknown. Here we see how identity can be the wild beast that emerges from the dark and scares us when we least expect it.

Identity can also emerge simply from discovering the meaning of our name, a task undertaken by Yitzchak Sofer in “The Scribe’s Son” by Avigayil Rosensweig. The subtleties of Avigayil’s piece and the poignant moments shared between a father and a son pave the lifelong journey of a scribe’s son as he pieces together the true meaning of his name. “Our name is not arbitrary...We are named Sofer because we are from a long line of scribes...” Sometimes, we need only bits of the past to recover pieces of our identity that existed long before us.

In “To Touch the Sky,” Shalva Gozland tells a similar story of Benny and his grandfather, as they recall moments of survival during World War II. “But as mad as they were...no one could ever take away my Jewish pride...and my will to survive.” Shalva’s use of metaphor to describe a grandfather’s proud fight for his Jewish identity (which parallels the young boy’s determination to “touch the sky” from his seat on his swing) creates a compelling piece about identity through the ages.

Sometimes identity shocks us, leaving a million questions in its wake. In “Driving Beneath the Surface,” Talia Alper describes the harsh way a young girl uncovers her true identity as an illegal immigrant. Suddenly, she has become a foreigner, the unwanted vagrant. Talia’s piece compels readers to question the part of them that feels inadequate, a trespasser on a stranger’s land. “The Polish Rabbi’s Great Grandson” by Chaya Sara Oppenheim tells the story of Michael, who discovers his Jewish roots and must learn to defend his newfound identity before he even has had a chance to truly claim it. “So, I guess that makes my family... my grandmother...”

my mother... me-- cockroaches.” Chaya Sara uses striking imagery like this to describe Michael’s reaction when a close friend insults his people and his past.

In “My (Dis)ability,” Shoshana Rosenthal writes bravely about the striking, real-life bond forged between herself and the autistic boy she works with. “The answer hit me like a bolt of lightning: my Aspergers.” Here, she uses her identity as a tool to communicate with the boy in a way no one else can. Identities can be just as freeing as they are imprisoning: Draisy Friedman powerfully details one’s entrapment within one’s own mind in “Someday, Together.” Draisy writes through the stream of consciousness of a girl who discovers herself a victim of her own identity—as a prisoner. In a similar piece, Shoshana Lipsius exposes the inner realms of an insane mind as it tries to decipher between reality and imagination. Her piece, “The White, White Walls,” is so compelling and beautifully mysterious as her main character recognizes a part of herself that lives outside of herself.

Finally, Dafna Stern draws inspiration from a very famous identity for her piece “From Nothing to Everything.” She utilizes factual details and creative license to explore the man, the myth and the legend that is Napoleon Bonaparte. Her compelling psychological portrait of this controversial French leader makes this piece a story we will not soon forget.

Personal identities are the sole divider between ‘I’ and the millions of ‘they’ that scatter our world. Throughout our lives, we are faced with the singular task of detaching ourselves from the rest of the pack by digging through the twisted vines of history and the tight threads that tie us to others in a search for self-discovery. Faded and bruised, mad and shaken, we finally emerge from our quests carrying the weight of our true selves on our shoulders.



# The Day I Learned What a Hero is

By Chevi Jacobson

# Homeless in the Night

by Tikva Nabatian

The day I learned my true nature was the day I found myself in a typical two story house.

There was a living room with toys and books scattered around a filthy floor, a dining room with grimy dishes on a rickety table, and a kitchen with a leaky faucet and a nearly empty fridge.

I found my way to the stairs and began my ascent. The stairs sighed as I brought myself to the second level. A door stood half open, and I crept my way through the open space.

The room was smaller than average and had nothing more than a bed and a closet. The bed was empty and sheet-less, exposing the stained mattress. The blanket was crumpled up on the wooden floor. The closet had a couple of distorted hangers, and the clothing was heaped in a pile under them.

I made my way into the next room. Green, blue, and black markers had clearly been used in an attempt to draw a picture on the wall. But it was impossible to make out what had tried to be portrayed. The bed was empty. There was no blanket, not even on the floor. There was nothing more in the room so I found my way into the hall.

Wait.

What was that?

A noise.

The last door on the floor was creaking open.

The door hesitantly opened to reveal a little girl no more than seven or eight rubbing her eyes with one hand while the other locked firmly onto a blanket. She opened her uncommonly large brown eyes and fixated them right on me. She was scared. I could see it in her eyes, which seemed to have changed to water as a tear of confusion slipped down her pale white cheek.

It doesn't have to end this way does it? Maybe I could just let her go?

No. That isn't me. I don't just let people go. I don't have a choice.

Her eyes made their way to where I was standing: in between her and the stairs. She shut them closed and muttered something under her breath that I couldn't make out. She kissed the blanket in her hand and let it float to the floor beside her.

What was she doing? Where was the screaming? The running in the other direction?

She lifted one leg and took an indecisive step forward.

I stayed where I was as the little girl began inching toward me one doubtful step at a time. She was only a few inches away from me and the stairs. She was so close to me that I could see my reflection in her eyes. And then she did it.

She walked straight through me.

I could hear them  
all howling my  
name into the  
otherwise silent  
night.

Leaving me only just enough time to damage the soles of her feet.

She tripped, plunging down the stairs as they groaned underneath her.

What was happening? Was she getting away?

I bound after her.

She had already stood up and was at the

front door.

I was almost halfway down the stairs, getting closer. I could sense the fear stronger now; no matter how brave this kid was, she was frightened. Just like everyone else I've faced in the past.

Her hands fidgeted with the knob. Maybe she wouldn't be able to open it. Maybe I would catch her after all.

I was at the bottom of the stairs; she was just a few feet away. She was mine.

She twisted the knob, and the door exploded open.

I stopped at the open doorway and watched as she stared back at me from the grass on the front lawn. Stared at the house I had destroyed. Stared as the firemen arrived in their big red trucks and screamed for everyone to let them through.

I stared back.

The girl curled up in her neighbor's arm, as the neighbor stood with sympathy pouring from her eyes

A large crowd began to form in the middle of the street. I could hear them all howling my name into the otherwise silent night.

“Fire!”

“Fire!”

“Fire!”

Oh no.

I had done it again.

Caused commotion.

Destroyed my surroundings.

I finally understood.

I did not belong to anyone or to anywhere: I was what I was, and I could never change.

# Driving Beneath the Surface

by Talia Alper

The day I learned that I had no idea who I was, I was busy celebrating my 16th birthday. And I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe that Mamá would have the guts to lie to me about who I really was. And the worst part was: I couldn't tell a soul.

All my life, mi familia has been pretty much invisible to the outside world. We don't have a big house and we never threw any fancy parties. Mamá is very quiet. She never raises her voice, never gets mad. I've never heard her scream or yell in my entire life. Carlos is, well, a little brother. There's no other way to describe him. Sometimes he's the most annoying creature on the planet, but most of the time he and I are good friends. And me? I'm nothing exciting. How could I be, growing up en mi casa? And we don't ever talk about Papá, since he left us when Mamá was still embarazada con Carlos .

Mamá is the most honest and kind person I know. And now I don't know if I'll ever fully trust her again. I mean, if she kept this from me since I was a year and a half old, who knows what else she's hiding from me? Maybe Papá didn't really leave us. Maybe my real name isn't Mariana. How would I know?

I'd been looking forward to my 16th birthday for months. I would finally be able to drive! I would never need to ride the school bus ever again! At first, it felt kind of strange, honestly, that my friends would make such a big deal over my 16th birthday. My family doesn't have any of this "Sweet Sixteen" stuff. I had my Quinceañera last year, so I really wasn't expecting anything big this year. Except for my driver's permit, that is! I rushed home after school on my birthday, ready to go with Mamá straight to the D.M.V. When I came skipping in the door, she told me to sit down. Could she possibly have another present for me?

I sat, biting my lip so that I wouldn't shout out a little cheer. Mamá looked me in the eye and told me quietly: "You're not getting your permit."

My heart sank, but I tried to stay positive.

"What about tomorrow?" I asked.

Mamá lowered her eyes. "Lo siento ," she said.

"Why?" I whined.

"You must promise not to tell."



“Ok, I won’t. I won’t tell anyone! Wait...even Carlos?”

“Even Carlos. No one.”

“I promise.”

“When I came to America, I didn’t come alone. I came with my two favorite people in the entire world: you and Carlos. Your father stayed in México, and we snuck into California. Si, I said ‘snuck.’ There was no other way.”

“But...but that means—”

“We are not legal. That is why you cannot go to get your permit. They ask you for many legal documents when you go, documents that you don’t have.”

Mamá is the most  
honest and kind  
person I know.  
And now I don’t  
know if I’ll ever  
fully trust her  
again.

“How could you not tell me this?! And what about Carlos? How could you not tell him?”

“I...I-”

“I can’t believe this!” I was so mad. I jumped up and ran straight to my room, which is just a drop bigger than a walk-in closet. I slammed the door and threw myself onto my mattress. It was just so unfair. But it did explain a lot, like why my family was always so quiet. And why Mamá never wanted to talk about Papá. He didn’t just walk out on us one day. We left him in México, when we came for a new life in America. I had my head buried under my thin blanket when I heard a tap-tap at my door. Carlos walked in and sat down at the edge of my mattress.

“Mariana? Qué pasó?”

I was about to tell him, but then I remembered my promise. “I-I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Mamá told me that she’s not letting you get your driver-thingy. I’m sorry...I know how excited you were about it.”

“Gracias, Carlos. You’re the best.”

Then Carlos left to go to the living room, which doubled as his bedroom. I stayed on my mattress and sulked as I realized that all my friends, and the rest of the world, would begin to drive and drift away while I would be stuck here with my family, trying hard not to be noticed.

# The Polish Rabbi's Great Grandson

by Chaya Sara Oppenheim

The day I learned I was a Jew was one of many days that have never held any significance to me. Groping in the dark to hit the snooze button on my alarm clock is how these countless days begin, followed by me realizing the futility of the effort; and at last hauling myself out of bed, I go about subjugating myself to eight hours of ceaseless monotony at school, till finally returning home for supper, and then

falling,

exhausted,

into bed once again,

all my hard work somehow never seeming to get me anything but older. The repetition of all these events has blurred into one long day in my mind- the same routine and expectations, with barely any fluctuation in either.

I learned this specific tidbit at dinner; it was one of those casual, throw-it-out-there facts my dad would toss into the meal at the kitchen table, as though it would somehow spice up his bland cooking. As much as, “Michael, did you know your great-uncle Irv was a stand-up comic in the US Army during WWII?” fascinated me, and this time, when my dad started going into religious heritage, I couldn’t help but express my disinterest as well.

“That’s nice, Dad.”

It was obvious that my father mistook my sarcasm. He nodded enthusiastically. “I think both your grandparents were Jewish. In fact,” he paused thoughtfully, “I do believe your mother’s mother was the child of a famous rabbi in Poland before the War.”

I’d never known Mom. She had died a week after I had been born. And please, don’t put on a sad face, and purse your lips sympathetically. I don’t need (or want) your pity.

But mom’s death hadn’t stopped dad from raising me. My dad’s epithet and occupation as a history professor has resulted in my upbringing depending on knowing every intricate detail that made this world go round,

I decided I  
hated when  
he called me  
Mikey.



including family genealogy. After all, as a die-hard agnostic, it's only in academia that Dad is a zealous believer. To me however, ethnicity has been all but a box to check off on applications to earn grants or scholarships. That was it.

I sullenly jabbed my third baked potato with my fork, simultaneously reaching for the butter across the table. Dad's supper specialty of baked potatoes, mashed potatoes and occasionally raw potatoes was undoubtedly the reason dinner was not exactly the focal point of either of our evenings. No wonder I was in a bad mood.

Methodically beginning to dissect the potato with the tip of my knife, I carefully inserted tiny pats of butter into the incisions and watched them melt into a warm yellow liquid, oozing over onto the brown, rugose skin of the potato.

Dad was still talking, preaching about Hitler and the Final Solution and the Warsaw Ghetto and whatever else was happening halfway across the world over seventy years ago. "The Jews in there were starving, you know. Freezing to death on the streets, without food, or proper hygiene. The wealthiest Jews of the city were reduced to lice-ridden beggars... with no one to beg from." He shook his head, slowly, earnestly. "And the people who had been beggars to begin with—"

"Is that why all you can make are potatoes?" I interrupted, picking up my fork with a piece of potato on it: a stab in his face. "Because all of our ancient ancestors are from Poland?"

Dad swallowed twice and was quiet.

Soon after that, I finished eating. When I was done with my homework, I went to bed.

\*\*\*\*\*

Rather... it was the day I learned I was among the vermin-worth-extermimating in the world that I never forgot. Winter was in the air like night was falling over the sky when Paul and I parked his black Porsche in the usual spot: at the edge of town, right off the highway, in the small clearing surrounded by trees. Autumn had been extremely mild: there were still leaves clinging to trees' branches; but now, when I got out of the car, there was the stinging smell of winter that made my eyes smart. Paul took an extra moment getting out and when he did, he tossed me a coke and,

catching it, I snapped it open. I leaned against the hood of his car, staring at the headlights' gleam across the ground, illuminating the stiff, arthritic grass in a stark, white light. The blades looked skeletal and dead.

"It's gotten colder," he said, shrugging his shoulders into a jacket. A white cloud followed his words; anyone passing by on the highway would have thought he was smoking. But in fact, Paul had never touched a cigarette in his life; he spoke of their deleteriousness so passionately that anyone listening would draw away from him, gasping for fresh air, wondering why he cared so much. But I knew Paul: he said everything passionately, whether he cared about the subject or not... and while everyone else lapsed into recidivism, his bad habit was being too intelligent.

Paul started pacing around the car, to generate some warmth, I assumed, one hand in his pocket, another holding his soda. I lifted the coke to my lips and paused, taking in the orange, light-polluted sky of the city nearby – the result of too many artificial Christmas lights – and listened to the slight wind whistling through the nearly bare trees. To my surprise, I could still hear crickets, the last remnants of summer, their chirping enervated, but still audible in the quiet, brisk evening.

"You hear that?" Surprise colored my voice. Paul, of course, knew exactly what I was talking about. Then, for some reason, a weird connection formed in my mind. "Just like the Jews after the War."

Paul nodded his head appreciatively; he liked metaphors. "Yeah." He then shrugged his head indifferently. "They'll be gone soon enough."

For the first time, I was confused with what he'd said. "The crickets will be... but the Jews are still here."

Paul smirked and quirked an eyebrow at me. "That's because the Jews are cockroaches, Mikey, not crickets."

Suddenly, it was a lot colder outside, but my face was hot. I laughed, uncomfortably. An awkward moment passed. I decided I hated when he called me Mikey.

"But that's the only difference," Paul relented, sitting down next to me on the hood. My mind was scrambling for something to say, simply because something needed to be said, but all I felt was an overwhelming aversion to sitting next to him. Another minute passed by.

“Man, snap out of it. You’re acting like I personally offended you, or something.” His voice was facetious, but there was an underlying blackness in his tone that made my stomach twist.

I finally regained control of my instinct to throw up. “Nah, don’t be stupid.”

But inside my head, I had reached the logistical conclusion. So, I guess that makes my family... my grandmother... my mother... me-- cockroaches.

A piece of potato-  
a stab in the face.

And when we got back into the car, Paul turned the knob up for the radio

and the blasting of the heat from the rotating vents of his Porsche blew out my thoughts;

and the next morning,

when I awoke to the vexing beep beep beep of my alarm clock

I groped to hit the snooze button

but before I realized the futility of the effort

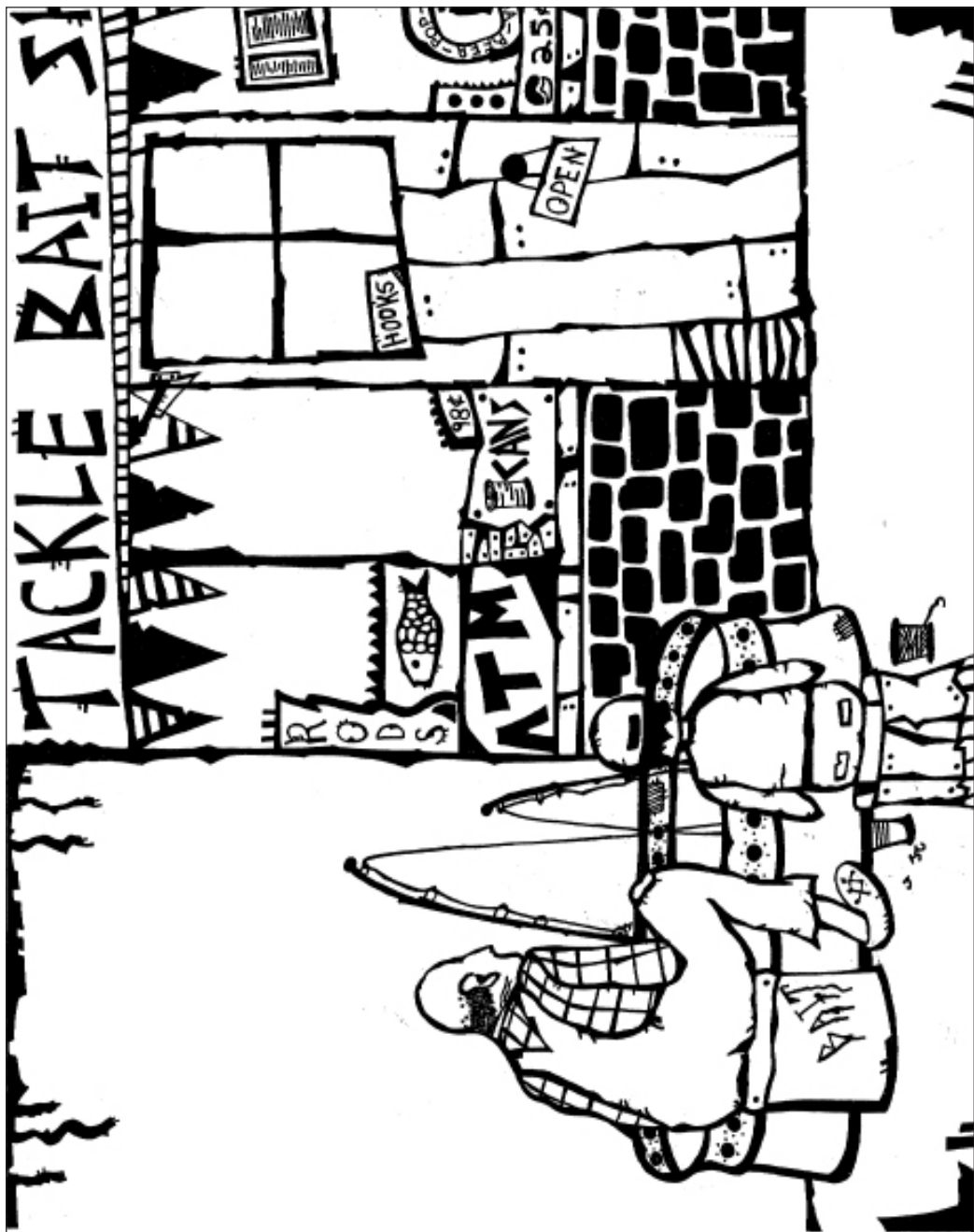
I saw that today, more than any other day,

it was

really,

really

dark outside.



# The Day I Learned To Improve

By Chayla Friedman

# The White, White Walls

by Shoshana Lipsius

The day I learned she wasn't coming home, I was sitting with her.

Her tears wet my shoulder as I softly rub her on the back. I feel her jerk in my arms, and I quickly recoil. I watch her scurry over to one cushioned wall as if something has frightened her. Her white outfit blends into the wall. Hands pound the walls as she tries to escape the prison of the white, white walls. But she will not be returning home. Deep down she knows this, and that is why she is afraid. There is no cure for her. She stares off at something in the distance that I cannot see. Screaming at a chorus of voices in her head that only she can seem to hear, she pounds at her chest. She scratches her arms, trying to divert the pain that is deeply imbedded inside her.

The doctors run in to sedate her, their eyes hardly glancing over at the spot where I stand. One pins her down, and I can feel her straining against their restraints, her only wish to be free like the bird that she sees floating around the ceiling. The sedative courses through her veins, calming her. Her body relaxes and I smile slightly, for she no longer has to feel the pain. The sedative has a calming effect on me, too. She sits with me now and stares off into the endless white of the room, her eyes glossy. Like a child, she suddenly slumps down on the cushioned floor and closes her eyes, occasionally tossing fitfully and muttering incoherently under her breath. I let myself out through the door, for she does not need me now.

When I return, there is a lady in to talk to her who has come to speak to her. I go over to the corner and silently lower myself to the ground. The lady's heavily lipsticked lips part in sympathy as she gazes upon her. She sits down beside her and tries to interest her in a conversation. The lady calls her Lydia, yet I know her name is Sarah. Sarah doesn't answer, for she knows it's not her name the woman is saying. The lady does not give an introduction, as she arrogantly expects Sarah to know who she is. Sarah's body shakes and convulses, trying to get a grip on reality but failing dismally. The lady hands Sarah a piece of paper and some crayons. Sarah scribbles swirls and dots that can only be a reflection of the confusion in



**Sarah scribbles  
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confusion in her  
mind.**

her mind. Then she places the paper down and begins to slip into a world of her own again.

The lady embraces Sarah and with a quick sigh exits the room. I sit down next to Sarah, and she slowly whispers to me, “Lydia, am I going to die?”

I am relieved that she knows I am beside her, that she is not so deep in her hallucinations that she can’t see me.

“No, Sarah, you’re going to be okay. You just have to believe me.” It is the only response I can give her. But she doesn’t believe me. She sees black shadowy figures advancing toward her, contrasting starkly with the bright white walls. She shrieks.

The doctor and the lady rush in at once. Sarah retreats into the corner, viewing them as a further threat in the obstacle course designed for her death. The doctor and the lady approach her tenderly. She pulls herself out of her hallucinations enough to ask the lady, “Who are you?”

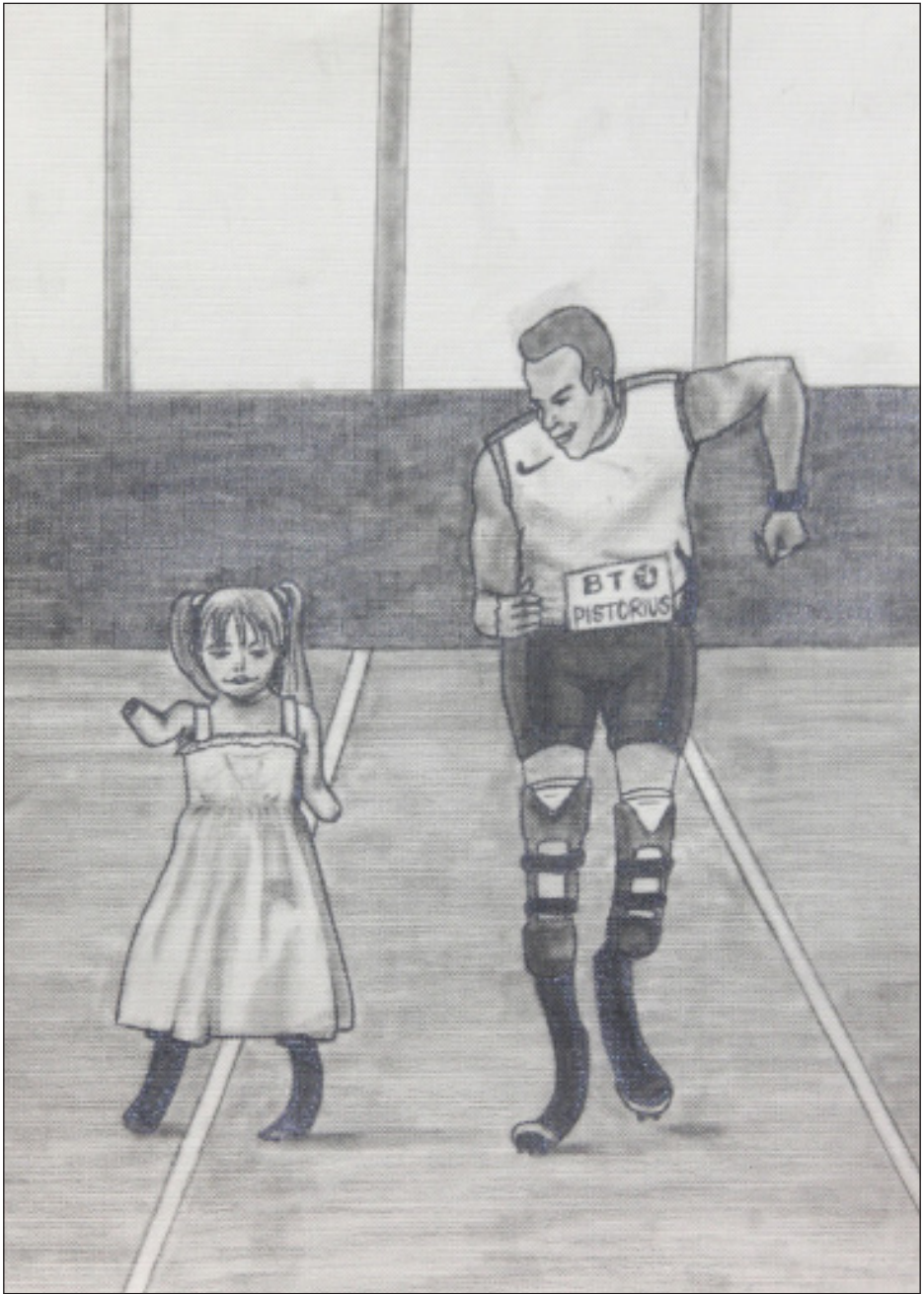
The lady’s eyes are filled with pain as she responds, “Your mother, Lydia.”

Sarah stares at me, her eyes filled with terror.

“What are you staring at?” her mother softly probes.

And then I see it dawn on Sarah – no, Lydia – at the same time it dawns on me. On that day I learned that I didn’t exist.





# The Day I Learned That Disabilities Aren't Inabilities

By Racheli Goldberg

# From Nothing to Everything

by Dafna Stern

The day I learned that small hands can hold ultimate power was the day I conquered the world. However glorious as this day may seem, it was preceded by some of the most tragic events, events than no man should ever have the misfortune of being cursed with.

You would think that being short would have helped me to blend into the crowd, that my small size would help me go unnoticed, yet a more unrealistic dream could not have been hoped for because it seemed that Fate's sole purpose was to crush my humble hopes and dreams. It didn't just strip me from the privilege of being like everybody else, it also made me stand out—and not in a good way. I was an aberration. An anomaly. Someone whose entire existence was some cruel joke. I was that poor child who got no sympathy, as I was constantly being shoved to the ground by the other children who mockingly told me that the ground isn't "too far down" anyway. What pains me the most, dear reader, was the fact that I accepted Fate. I did not stand up for myself and defend my dignity. I tolerated it like a coward. I even started to believe them when they said that I was an abomination, a mistake.

But then everything changed. My father died. Wrought with grief, I hit rock bottom—with nowhere to go but up. And up I went. Immediately after his death, I became the new head of the family. This position was accompanied by a strange new feeling: power.

As the head of the household, I had a certain authority over the rest of my family. My words held meaning and my commands were followed. As I grew accustomed to this sensation, I began to enjoy it...no. I needed it. The more power I had, the more I needed. I was addicted. I soon found myself giving orders just for the sake of them being followed. I think that my siblings began to see the crazed look in my eyes that signaled how much the power was getting to me. I didn't care. I was in charge. They had to listen to me.

Soon, mere control over my family wasn't enough. Sure, I had power as the head of the household, but what was commanding a few people

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to do routine tasks compared to the larger picture? I needed more. So I enlisted in the French army, where I realized just how different I was from the other soldiers. Whereas they all enlisted for nationalist or monetary reasons, my motives were purely egotistical. I was unique. I had a tremendous aptitude toward battlefield strategy and tactics—and I knew it. I started to make my way up the ranks of the French army and soon became a general where there I stood, at a measly 5'2, in front of the entire cavalry, barking orders and leading them into battle.

And it didn't stop there. Why should I settle for a country when I could rule the entire world? It was at the age of 35 that I crowned myself the emperor of France. By doing so, I cemented my legacy in history as I, Napoleon Bonaparte, conquered the world.

# My (Dis)ability

by Shoshana Rosenthal

The day I learned that my disability can be an advantage was the day I spent with a child who has severe autism.

Ever since I was a kid, I knew I was different. It's not typical for a young child to insist on following every school rule. It's not typical for a six-year-old child to sit down on the couch and read the same three books again and again and again. It's not typical for a kindergartener to tell their classmates to drink their milk because the calcium makes their bones strong. That child was me. What I did was not typical, making me not typical.

As I got older, it became obvious to me that being different is confusing. I did not understand why I couldn't always say what I was thinking. Yet, I was upset whenever anyone said something to me that I perceived as insulting, even if, in reality, it wasn't. I could not recognize the warning signs of someone losing patience with me. I would keep prattling on about the characters in the latest novel I was obsessed with, oblivious to the boredom evident on my suffering listeners' faces. Even now, I sometimes have trouble with this.

A few years later, my mother figured out what was going on. She suddenly recognized my social awkwardness, my inability to interpret body language, my obsessive interests, and many of my other quirks as symptoms of mild Asperger's Syndrome.

The diagnosis shocked me. I was already 12, and the thought of being autistic terrified me to no end. My brother has autism, and I remembered the never-ending recitations of TV shows, the constant interrogations about the latest software for the computer, the hypersensitivity, and many other aspects of my brother that would drive me crazy. I didn't want to be associated with this disability that gave me so much aggravation.

Despite my refusal to face my own disorder and the frustration I sometimes had with my brother, I loved volunteering with other children who had special needs. When a local organization for children with special needs made their yearly winter camp in my school, I was extremely excited, not because we would be missing class time, but because I had the oppor-

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tunity to spend a day with my beloved special friends. I had always had an unusual connection to special children, but I thought it stemmed from being the sibling of a boy with autism. Now I know that the connection also comes from somewhere else.

When I walked into the room designated for the program, I smiled. I was ready to spend the next three and a half hours giving the child whom I would be assigned to work with the best time he could possibly have. At 9:30, the kids all arrived, bursting with excitement. The program director randomly paired up girls in my class and kids with special needs. The assignments were random, except for mine. The director deliberately assigned Shimmy, a boy with severe autism, to me. Despite the fact that Shimmy could not say a word and relied on gestures and a program on his iPad for communication, I was not the least bit daunted by the task. I knew I could handle it.

I asked Shimmy what he wanted to do first, and he ran toward the rug surrounded by piles of children's books. I spent the next half an hour reading *The Cat in the Hat*, *Green Eggs and Ham*, and *Fox in Socks* to Shimmy, again, and again, and again. As I finished *Green Eggs and Ham* for the fourth time, one of my classmates asked me in wonder, "How do you do it? How can you keep reading the same book over and over again?" I simply shrugged and started reading *Fox in Socks* for the fourth time.

All was going well until Shimmy's iPad suddenly died, disabling his primary mode of communication. My first thought, as the program director plugged in the iPad to charge, was "What am I going to do?" Then, I started thinking reasonably; my brother hadn't had an iPad when he had limited language and we had communicated just fine. I decided to trust my instincts in order to understand Shimmy.

The activity after free time was davening. I could tell that Shimmy wanted to sit on my lap, so I let him. Again, my classmates asked me how I knew that was what Shimmy wanted. "I just knew," I replied. About five minutes later, Shimmy started getting restless, so I stood up, picked him up, and spun him around. Once again, my classmates wanted to understand how I knew what to do, and once again I replied, "I just knew." It was strange; it was almost like I could read Shimmy's mind.

Shimmy and I did the rest of the activities together, our preferred

mode of communication being smiling at each other and him pulling my arm. I spoke to him a little bit, but most of our communication didn't require words. The iPad was charged again, but we didn't need it; we were communicating through our hearts.

After all the children were picked up at the end of the program, my classmates and I all reflected on our morning. Yet again, I was asked how I knew exactly how to handle Shimmy. Yet again, I replied "I just knew." In my heart, however, I questioned my words. How did I know? Why were my instincts so accurate?

The answer hit me like a bolt of lightning: my Aspergers. My disability had enabled me to truly understand special children. Shimmy and I had not only communicated with our hearts, but also with the special souls we shared.

# Someday, Together

by Draisry Friedman

The day I learned my punishment was to be trapped in this school forever, I laughed. Because really, how was that a bad thing? I'd get to live forever, even if I had to spend it all in one place.

Now, looking back, I can't believe what a fool I was.

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It's raining again. It's always raining in this school. Except on days like yesterday, when the sun shone. Intellectually, I know that days like yesterday happen more often than not, that the sun does shine here. But that doesn't matter. Here, there is no such thing as yesterday or tomorrow. Everything feels like it's always been happening.

Rose sits beside me, watching with a hazy expression as the rain steadily falls. She looks restless, like always. Right now, she's pulling at her clothes, probably thinking about how much she'd love to get out of the stiff school uniform, tug on her gym clothes and go running—if only the rain would stop.

I don't like remembering that my life is just a series of repetitions...

Rose doesn't know what this school is. She doesn't realize that she is trapped in an endless today. And maybe she isn't. After all, over the hundreds, maybe thousands of years I've been trapped here, there have been others. People who have left this school. Some-

times I think I must have made them up in a desperate attempt to convince myself that there is a way out.

But the past doesn't matter. Right now, Rose is my only friend. She always has been, always will be. Until she isn't.

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By noon, it's still raining. Rose is actually sitting still now, so still that I'm almost convinced she's fallen asleep. So when she whispers my name, I can't help but jump just a little.

"Sorry," she says. "I didn't mean to surprise you. It's just..." She trails off, staring out the window, her eyes unreadable. There's something in her expression that makes her look almost melancholy.

"What is it, Rose?" I ask. I don't like the look on her face. Melancholy

doesn't suit Rose.

She turns to smile at me, but it's hollow. "It's nothing really. I was just wondering..." She breaks off again, hugging her knees to her chest. "Angie...do you ever get the feeling that all this has already happened? That we've done this before?"

I stay silent. Because I have done this before, with Rose and with all the others, the ones whose faces I can't remember. But I don't like thinking about it. I don't like remembering that my life is just a series of repetitions, that no matter what I do, who I do it with, every day is the same. That there is no tomorrow, because tomorrow is really just today, except the sun might shine. Or it might not. It doesn't matter, because every day is the same.

Yes, I don't like thinking about. So I don't say anything. Instead, I smile. It's a smile I've learned over the years, a mask I've perfected to hide how empty I am.

"Never mind," Rose says at last. "It was a stupid question."

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The next day it's raining, just like it always is.

I am prepared to spend another day indoors, reading books I've already read and having conversations about topics I've already discussed to death. I am not prepared for Rose to stand up and declare that she is just so sick of all this rain, and she doesn't care if she's going to catch a cold, she's going running and I am going with her.

I follow her in a daze. What is she doing? This isn't in the script. How can she be doing this?

Completely oblivious to my shock, Rose pulls me out the door. We aren't even wearing raincoats. Do I even own a raincoat? I don't know. Why should I? We never go out when it rains.

We've been outside for only a minute or two, and I can already feel my dress getting heavier. It's digging into my shoulders, pulling me down. The rain hammers against my skin. I can't remember the last time I've felt this much. It's wonderful, but it's too much. I feel like I am drowning.

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When we get back, the sun is shining.



I make tea because it's comfortable and familiar and I am at a loss for what else to do. We drink it in silence to my relief. It gives me a chance to think about what just happened. How did she do it? How could she just so casually break the pattern, turn today into a new day? It should have been impossible.

"Hey," Rose says suddenly. "What do you think you'll do after you graduate?"

For some reason, the question causes something sharp to twist inside my chest.

"I don't know," I keep my voice calm and pleasant, forcing it not to shake. "I've never really thought about it."

"Hmmm," Rose has the look in her eyes again, the melancholy one." I don't really know either." She sips her tea, a thoughtful expression on her face. "Hey, Angie..." she says, then trails off. She's been doing that a lot lately. It's not like her.

"What is it?"

She takes another sip of tea before responding. "It's nothing really, just...you won't leave me, right? I mean, I know eventually we'll have to leave this school and do our own thing, but we'll still see each other, won't we?"

Years of practice in keeping my composure means that the tea cup doesn't fall from my hand, but it's a near thing. Because suddenly I understand.

They never trapped me, not really. It was always possible to change the script. But I had gotten so used to everyday being the same, that the idea of change had become frightening, even painful. So I convinced myself that it was impossible. That every day was the same. But tomorrow did exist, and the others, the ones before Rose, realized this and left me for the outside world.

But Rose is different. Rose didn't leave without me because she wants to leave with me. She showed me that change is possible, even if it's painful.

I smile, and this time it's bright and true. Because Rose is worth the pain. Because I'm determined that we will leave this place, someday. Together.



# The Day I Learned To Dance In The Rain

By Devorah Silverman

# To Touch the Sky

by Shalva Gozland

The day I learned what it means to survive, I was soaring. The heat of the August sun on the rusty metal swing scorched my skin, but I didn't care; on that day, nothing mattered to me more than having my Grandpa. I loved my Grandpa. He said I was his favorite. Grandpa was the best at pushing me on the swing. "Higher, Grandpa, higher!" I laughed, as I soared through the wind with open arms like a bird with unclipped wings. I felt like the freest boy on earth. Grandpa pushed me higher, and higher, and higher, until I could almost reach the sky. I could see the whole world when Grandpa pushed me. Grandpa told me that if I pumped a little harder, I could touch the sky. After many long hours of pushing me on the swing that day, Grandpa pulled up his sleeve and wiped away the sweat that drenched his furrowed eyebrows. As I looked down to watch my Grandpa, something strange caught hold of my curious eyes.

"Grandpa," I wondered, as the swing began to slow down, "why are there numbers on your arm?" Grandpa stared at his arm, his face blank as parchment. He gulped hard as though it was the last time he would.

"Benny," he turned to me, "do you know what it means for the world to go mad?" I stared at my grandfather with twisted eyebrows, as though he had just declared the sky purple.

"What do you mean, Grandpa? Did someone make the world upset? Did someone take away his toys or push him in the sand box? What happened, Grandpa? Why did the world get mad?" Grandpa closed his eyes and pressed his lips together. I could see that something was weighing down the tired soul that lived beneath that sagged face. Eighty-three years had scribbled many uneven lines on my grandfather's crinkled face, although Grandpa always told me that I kept his spirit young. Grandpa struggled for the words with which to answer me, the then innocent little boy who knew the world as nothing more than fluffy white clouds and big blue talking trains.

"Benny," he finally managed to say while choking on the tears that flooded his tender eyes, "imagine a time when all of your neighbors followed the voice of one man who didn't like your religion."

Grandpa told me  
that if I pumped  
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sky.



“What do you mean, Grandpa?” I felt confused.

“Well, they decided that since we had different beliefs, we just didn’t deserve to live. They were afraid of us because we were different.” I looked straight into my grandfather’s eyes.

“You mean they didn’t like us just because we’re Jewish?” I asked, my little brain still trying to grasp this giant concept of hatred. My grandfather nodded, his fingers pinching the eyes beneath his creased forehead. He was in pain.

“Benny, they took everything away from us. They raided our homes, dragged us away to concentration camps where they worked us day and night. They starved us. They tortured us. They mocked us. They beat us. They used us. They stole six million lives.” Children ran, laughed, and played all around us. Yet, somehow, the world stood still and the silence was so loud that its scream echoed through my eardrums. I could feel my heart beating so fast it felt like it was going to leap out of my chest.

“Oh, Grandpa, that’s not true, right? They were just being silly, right Grandpa?” Frustration knocked my brain, and I wished I could just make sense of all of this. My grandfather stood silently as his eyes pierced the pavement. I understood this was no longer a bad dream.

“Bbbut, but, but Grandpa, what did you do?” I was searching for an answer to this crazy tale.

“Benny, they may have starved me ‘till I was frail, beat me ‘till I bled, and worked me ‘till I could no more. They stole my name and considered me a number and deprived me of any human dignity. But as mad as they were, and as hard as they tried, no one could ever take away my Jewish pride, my courage, and my will to survive. And they knew it.” My eyes grew wide and my lip dropped open.

“But Grandpa, what made you believe?”

“Well son I, I,”—my grandfather took a deep breath—“G-d was pushing me up and up, and as I flew against the wind, I kept my head held high and I knew that if I just pumped a little harder, I could reach the sky.”

“Grandpa, are you a hero, like Superman?” Grandpa smiled as he gently kissed my forehead and twirled me in the air.

“No,” he whispered into my ear as I landed into his soft arms, “I’m a Jew.”

# The Scribe's Son

by Avigayil Rosensweig

The day I learned the true meaning of my name was the day I realized that my father had been teaching it to me my whole life. The beginning – or one beginning, at least – can be found one evening after sundown in a quiet home, where a bearded man sits hunched over a roll of parchment. The light of a lamp spills over the manuscript. The man's hands and face are illuminated; the table and walls lie in shadow. It is quiet but for the rhythmic scratching of a quill pen. From the edge of the man's pen, neat, blocky Hebrew letters drop down on the parchment in shining ink, glistening for a few moments until dulling as they dry. The letters are precise, neatly lined up, crowned with small turrets.

This is my earliest memory, so far as I can tell. The man is my father, his beard darker and shorter than it is these days. I was perhaps three years old at the time, observing my father's every action. My mother died giving birth to me on Simchat Torah, the day we celebrate the Torah. In the synagogue, the men danced with the Torah scrolls in their arms, among them a newly completed one, the first Torah scroll produced by my father's hands. As they danced, my father rejoiced in his son and mourned his young wife. I never knew my mother, and I poured two parents' worth of devotion into my father.

When I was four and five years old, I would climb into his lap as he worked, curling my small body into his arms and watching, almost mesmerized, as the letters formed at the edge of the quill. I fell asleep to the scratching of that pen. It calmed me through nightmares, soothed me when upset. I was a quiet boy, too easily and too frequently upset by my peers, and I sought refuge in my father's arms and in the beautiful characters that flowed across the pieces of parchment that covered our home. I would sit as motionless as I could, but still I am amazed at the deft steadiness of his hand even as I shifted and poked my head out over his arms to observe his work.

The first word I ever learned how to write was *bereshit*: in the beginning. I was five years old at the time, old enough to be intrigued by the

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mystery of the letters that I had seen my whole life. My father had just started working on a new sefer torah. He had written one word – the first word – and lain it aside, leaning back in his chair lost in thought. I came over, climbed into his lap, and tugged at his beard to get his attention. I pointed at the word.

“What does that say?”

He wrapped his arms around my shoulders and kissed my head through my kippah.

“Bereishit. In the beginning.” Then he began chanting the words I knew so well from Simchat Torah, my birthday. “Bereishit bera Elokim et hashamayim v’et ha’aretz: In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth.” My father was not especially musical, but his voice was pleasant to listen to and familiar and always sounded best when he was chanting a Torah portion.

“Why does it say et?” he said, almost to himself, addressing the top of my head. “The word has no independent meaning. But the word et always comes to add. We are taught that at that instant of Creation, G-d created not just the heavens and the earth but all of Creation, and spent six days fixing them in their place. Six days just to put everything in order when all of Creation happened in an instant? We see that everything has a place, Yitzchak, everyone has a job towards which G-d will direct him.”

I nodded dutifully, knowing where my place was: with my father and the Torah scrolls and mezuzot and tefillin he penned. That day I tried to reproduce the word – bereishit – in my own clumsy hand. My father soon started teaching me to read and write. I became literate through the most beautiful calligraphy.

When I was a little older, I came home one day with a new word: artisan—one who crafted. I knew my father crafted beautiful manuscripts, so I asked if we were artisans. My father shook his head seriously.

“Your name is Yitzchak Sofer,” he said. “Do you know why that is our family name – Sofer – scribe? Our name is not arbitrary, nor is it chosen for a place we lived. We are named Sofer because we are from a long line of scribes. We have been writing sifrei torah and scrolls for mezuzot and tefillin for generations. Soon I will teach you, too, to be a scribe. You, too, will produce sifrei torah and tefillin and mezuzot. Every word read from those sifrei torah, every prayer prayed with those tefillin, and every time a man hangs a mezuzah on his doorpost and fulfills the biblical commandment – “and you shall write them (the words of Torah) on the doorposts of your homes and on your gates” – part of that mitzvah belongs to you. We are not artisans, Yitzchak. We are more than artisans. We are scribes.”

We are scribes. My name is Yitzchak Sofer, son of Shimon Sofer. Yitzchak the Scribe.



# The Day I Learned That Everyone Can Learn To Read

By Shayna Strum

THE DAYI



# 2

Section

## The Power of Love

# The Power of Love

by Ava Katz, Editor

When we are truly engaged in giving and receiving love, we don't ponder the philosophical question of what love is. It is only when love is lacking that we begin to contemplate this enormous concept. The following section of the *Literary Journal* provides an apt definition for love, one of the most complex of all emotions.

In "Bob's Conundrum," Miriam Schuster conveys to us the intricacy of love. She uses choppy language to transport the reader into a world of robots: emotionless with nothing but commands that must be followed. Bob is a robot in a hospital who encounters a baby but cannot understand the baby: "Bob's CPU searching, searching. Trying to process. 'ERROR. UNDEFINED CHARACTERS.'" Elena Abraham tackles the same aspect of love in her piece "From Light to Dark." She presents a very unique point of view—that of a baby inside the womb. The baby is on a journey to the outside world where it encounters its mother, a source of love. "Despite not knowing what this gigantic creature was, her words were the most comforting words imaginable." The baby cannot understand the love its mother gives, but it still feels her love.

Hadassah Herskovich presents another aspect of love in "How to Bake a Birthday Cake": the importance of protecting love. It is the story of a flight attendant who receives her big break as a flight attendant for European Airways. When she realizes that accepting this job opportunity has made her miss her daughter's ballet recital, she is hit with the realization that love is more important than her job: "My heart felt like it had smashed into an airplane." Estee Gerber is also successful in exhibiting the power of love in her story, "Hidden Heroes." It is the story of Victoria Soto, teacher at Sandy Hook Elementary School, as seen through the eyes of one of her students, and the sacrifice that Victoria made: giving up her life to protect her students. A similar love is displayed in "Untied," in which Gabriella Hawk examines an argument between a little girl and her mother: "Mommy didn't let me lick the spoon; she said I could get 'samolella.'" The reader knows what the young narrator does not—that the mother is only trying to protect her young daughter because of her enormous love.

In "My Grandmother's Pearls," a work of nonfiction, Baila Schuster exhibits the intransience of love. She uses beautiful descriptions to depict the love of a grandmother for her granddaughter and the pearl earrings given as a token for that love: "I can feel my grandmother's embrace through

the weight of the pearls on my ears.” Leah Steinberg shows the strength of love in “One is not JUST One.” This is the touching personal story of Leah’s grandfather, who “never let the fact that one was missing become a handicap.” Instead, his love of life, his family, and mitzvot propelled him forward to live a meaningful life. Correspondingly, in “The Sparkling Witness,” Leah Bertram demonstrates that love can override all challenges. This extremely well-written piece is the story of a diamond: how it was separated from the bride who wore it because of a pressing monetary need, and how, with the love and help of her father-in-law, it was finally returned to her.

The writers in this section have each approached love in a unique way. By revealing love’s many facets, the writers lead us to draw our own conclusions about what love truly means.



# The Day I Learned That I Can Do It, Too

By Nechama Buchen

# From Dark to Light

by Elena Abraham

The day I learned of my dark, forsaken world was the same day I discovered light and love. I was alone, and the loneliness seemed everlasting. The eerie silence was rarely broken, only by the strangest gurgling sounds imaginable. Nothing ever happened in my dark and cramped world. Ironically, in the most uneventful of places, there was room for much concern. My world was shrinking. I could barely sit up without smashing my head; luckily the ceiling was soft, causing no serious injuries. I curled up into a ball, the only manageable position, and began to cry. According to my calculations, it was only 2 days before I would be crushed to death.

Crying wasn't helping my alarming situation, so I began to brainstorm. Perhaps I could push the surrounding walls back to their original position? I pushed with all my might, but sadly to no avail. The walls had

The walls had a mission – to crush me – and I had no strategy to stop this plan.

a mission – to crush me – and I had no strategy to stop this plan. I had a feeling my doom would come from the very walls I kicked so passionately. I didn't want to kick them, but it became a habit. Oh, how I suddenly regretted all those late night kicking fits. This wasn't the time for regrets; this was the time for critical planning. And suddenly it hit me: I needed to escape.

Who knew what lay ahead, or how long the journey would last? However, in my situation the unknown was definitely better than the known. My escape began at midnight. I began running towards the light with all my might, but suddenly I could go no more. I looked behind me and realized that I was attached to the wall by a coarse brown cord. I began to tug the cord with all my energy, finally successfully breaking it. I was free! I took one last look at the only world I had ever known and jumped toward the light.

The place that I thought I knew so well was just a mere corridor to a bright, colorful, happening, new world in front of me. The lights became so bright, the air so dry, the space so large and the sounds so loud—I began to scream! Where am I? What is this place? Would I survive?

My heart was racing as I gagged and coughed on these blasts of cold air. I soon realized that if I didn't keep breathing every few seconds, I

wouldn't survive to experience this newfound adventure.

Something warm suddenly wrapped around me. What a special feeling to be embraced by another person's giant, caring, open arms.

As I was being cuddled, I heard someone whisper to me: "Hi, I'm your mother. I will take care of you, watch you, and love you forever.

"What is a mother?" I wondered.

Despite not knowing what this gigantic creature was, her words were the most comforting words imaginable. For so long I had been all alone in the darkest, most frightening world, wondering if someone would ever come join me. No more. I left that place and had a partner, a mother.

The word "love" kept ringing in my ears. What is love? Every time my mother used this word, she squeezed me close to her heart. I clutched my mother's finger and brought it close to my mouth. This was my expression of love.

I knew I wasn't alone anymore. I would never be alone again. This new world comprised the most magnificent gift, a mother, someone who would care for me, love me and always be there to lend a helping hand.

# Hidden Heroes

by Estee Gerber

The day I learned to stay silent was the day Vicki died.

“Now, now, Jessie, remember to use your indoor voice,” smiles Vicki, as she bends over to admire my drawing. (Only I get to call her Vicki because I’m her five-star student.)

“It’s you and me at Sandy Beach!” I whisper because I’m very good at taking directions. Vicki and Mommy say I’m the best five year old listener ever! “Do you remember when you, me and Charlie went to the beach for the WHOLE day and ate seven ice creams and saw the sky turn pink?”

“Of course!” sings Vicki, jumping up like those clowns in Jack-in-a-Boxes. Daddy doesn’t let me have one. He says they cause atrial fibrillation.

“Use your inside voice!” I whisper and scold, my finger raised like I have to go the bathroom.

“And that’s why you’re the only one who has five stars,” Vicki quietly says as she rubs my hair, messing up my headband that I just got, but I don’t say anything because I know it’s not nice.

.....  
When a chance  
for love or true  
accomplishment  
comes and goes,  
we can never be  
sure it will present  
itself again.

As Vicki walks to Lavender’s desk, I see Maybelline smile a little smile that I don’t think is meant to make me feel better. Yesterday she showed Sammy her mean smiles. I wasn’t eavesdropping. I was just practicing math. She points to my hair. I stick my tongue out but quickly stick it back in as Vicki looks around the classroom to make sure everyone is behaving. Since I have five whole stars, I have to be a role model; Daddy even says so. Maybelline just narrows her little blue eyes, which I think might have turned the color of my new American girl doll dress (the blue one with little pom poms) and stares at me until Vicki turns around.

I slowly go back to my drawing. It’s very pretty, and maybe this will be the one that the big museum in Manhattan will accept because now I know how to spell my name. I had drawn the background pink, purple and orange because I couldn’t find blue; it was all the colors the sun turned before it sank into the water. I had started crying because I was scared the sun wouldn’t come up again tomorrow, and Grandma had promised to take me

horseback riding as soon as the sun came up. But Charlie promised it would come up in the morning, and it did. Charlie always keeps his promises because he was once a judge, and he always says, “Justice must be served to the innocent,” or something like that.

Riding on the waves is me, Vicki, and Charlie, but we’re green in my painting because last week Maybelline hid my yellow crayon, and I only found it when I took my first bite of my grilled cheese sandwich. I still don’t understand how she managed to do that, but I will soon because Uncle Lenny got me a spy kit for my birthday this year.

I turn my head and admire the small brown poster with everyone’s name on it. Only mine has five shiny stars next to it. Maybelline has four and a half. She got half off after I nearly died from asphyxiation. I think about how unfair it is; she should have gotten off at least one from attempting third degree murder (Charlie again), after all everyti- BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

Vicki glances up sharply, and I see recognition in her eyes as the loud noises continue. One, two, three, four... they go on and on and on. I’m not in advanced math yet. People are screaming, and for some reason it stops my blood from running. My body is ice. Vicki turns toward me, and there’s something wild and very, very, very scared in her chestnut eyes that makes me wish for pink sky.

“Get in the closet now,” she says hoarsely. Her eyes never leave the doorframe. I jump up too quickly, and my chair bangs the tiled floor. The sound is like gunfire from Bugs Bunny. I am pushed into a narrow closet. Maybelline is to my left, and Lavender is to my right. Maybelline won’t stop biting her thumb, and I’m about to tell her to stop when Vicki pushes her face inside and quietly says, “There’s a bad man in the school right now. I need you all to be very, very quiet, like the mice in Softly Softly.” And just like that Vicki’s gone and the door’s shut.

That was the last time I ever saw Victoria Soto, my teacher, friend, and role model.



# How to Bake a Birthday Cake

by Hadassa Herskovich

The day I learned how to bake a birthday cake, I was thirty- five years old and it wasn't anyone's birthday.

We were eating dinner at my younger brother Josh's. Again.

If you opened up any of our kitchen cabinets, you would probably find pretzels. Or roasted peanuts. Maybe a few bags of Lays potato chips and a can of Sprite. So my daughter Emily and I were regular supper guests at the Hapring household. Sometimes, Emily would ask me to make dinner, for just the two of us, at our house. But after being in the air all day, when I got home I was by no means in the mood to cook up an elaborate meal.

I stepped through the peeling, wood door and held out my arms to the little ballerina in front of me.

On Emily's birthday one year, we picked up takeout from the Chinese restaurant and ate it together. Just the two of us. I don't know if that was really what Emily had in mind, but she was happy after I surprised her with an ice cream cake from Carvel—except then by mistake, I ate the part that said “Wow, You're Eight!” and she went up to her room crying. So now we just have dinner at Josh's. And last

year my sister- in- law Kathy made a homemade Cinderella birthday cake, and Emily got the slice that said “Wow, You're Nine!” in pretty pink frosting. A nice improvement.

Kathy brought out the chicken, and I think Emily was trying to tell me something about how another kid hit her in school that day when my cell phone began buzzing.

“Oh my G-d!” I cut off Emily's “and then she didn't even get in trouble...” “OH. MY. G-D!” I shrieked as I read the email for a second time. “European Airways has an opening!”

“So that means...?” Josh probed.

“Well, they're short a crew member and really desperate so...I mean it's not even a question! Of course I'm going to take the job! I guess that... that I'll be flying to Italy this weekend!!!”

“Oh wow, Debby. Umm, that's great. But, umm...what about Emily? You do know that you won't be home in time for dinner if you're flying

halfway across the world?”

Oh, Emily.

“Yeah, so it would be okay if she sleeps over by you, right?”

“You know that we’ll never say no...”

“Perfect, so it’s all settled then. Hey. Speaking of Emily, where did she disappear to?”

“I’m right here.” I turned around to a hoarse voice.

“What’s with all the tissue, honey? You have a cold?”

“No. Mom, you didn’t forget about my ballet—”

“Okay, good. ‘Cause I really don’t have time to take you to the doctor now.”

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“Sprite or Coke, sir?” I fumbled for some European Airways-embossed napkins under the trolley. It had only been an hour into the flight and I was already on cloud nine. There was something magical about being on a plane. It was almost as if I had left some of my baggage on the ground.

Just then I heard a buzz. Oh no, how could I have forgotten to turn off my phone! Looking around to make sure that none of the other flight attendants were nearby, I stole a peek at my phone. Reminder: Today, June 22nd the screen read. I pressed on the note and my heart felt like it had smashed into an airplane. Emily’s ballet recital 12:00.

I knew that Kathy would take Emily home to retrieve her ballet slippers. She would put her hair in a pretty bun and maybe dab some blush on her cheeks. She would take Emily to the theatre. Then she would clap and hug her at the end. And while Emily would be twirling across the stage, her mother would be taking orders for champagne thirty thousand feet above her.

“Marline,” I called to my new coworker, “Please, pass me a ginger ale. I just got nauseous all of a sudden.” And as I drank the soda, my mouth felt dry and my eyes wet.

After 28 grueling hours back and forth between continents, the plane finally touched down in Saint Paul International Airport. I didn’t wish any

passengers well. I just ran and ran until I saw my house. I stepped through the peeling, wood door and held out my arms to the little ballerina in front of me. She just shook her head. I could hardly see her turn around and run to her room because suddenly the whole house seemed blurry. I groped for a tissue and then out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a Dunkin Hein's vanilla confetti birthday cake mix. I took a deep breath.

"Emily," I beckoned. "I need your help." Emily came to the doorway hesitantly and stared at me. I reached for another tissue before I choked out, "Can you get the see if we have any eggs, please?" More staring. I took another deep breath. "Let's see if I can figure out how to bake a cake."

"But it's not anyone's birthday," Emily said.

"I think I have a lot of birthdays to make up for."

And Emily smiled.



# The Day I Learned To Break Free

By Henya Areman

# The Sparkling Witness

by Leah Bertram

The day I learned how far a father, a son, and a daughter-in-law would go for one another proved what I've always believed. As a diamond dealer, I've watched jubilant couples choosing rings, and I've been there through the sadness of a stone being returned. I've always thought diamonds are more than just sparkly stones: they, like people, have each got their own stories. There is one diamond, however, that I sold, bought back and sold again. Along with the stone comes a unique story of love, pride, and family.

When I met Shija Bertram for the first time, I could sense just how special he was. He had gone through the war and been robbed of his eldest son, his livelihood, and his home. But these sufferings never made him hard or bitter. He was a gentle man of few words, who quickly became one of my closest friends.

When Shija's surviving son, Morris, got engaged, I was exultant to see Shija get the happiness he so deserved. Morris and his bride Reva came in together and purchased one of the most beautiful diamonds I've ever sold.

In the year 1964, this diamond's story really began. It was a Monday, sometime around noon, when the bells of my store and a blast of cold air announced the arrival of Morris and Reva. Pink checked and bright eyed, they looked simultaneously downtrodden and proud.

The diamond  
winks at me from  
his palm as Shija  
leaves in a flurry  
of bells and spring  
breeze.

"Mr. Schreiber," said Morris, speaking rapidly. "I'm going to be straight with you: business is down, and the company needs capital. The ring Reva and I purchased three years ago would give us the funds we need... but - I...we don't want my father to know." His voice cracked and Reva took over.

"We know diamond sales are up now, so...this should cover things. But please, please, whatever you do, don't tell my father-in-law! You're his friend, you know it would break him..."

Their youth and sincere selflessness both warms and breaks my heart, and I promise to keep their secret. We complete the transaction, and in a rush of well wishes and bittersweet smiles, the couple leaves.

I am still gazing at the diamond when a chime and winter air signal

the arrival of a new customer. I hastily slip the gem into my apron and blanch when I see who it is.

“Ah, Sydney, my friend. May I take your reaction to mean my son and daughter-in-law have already paid you a visit?”

My heart drops. “Shija, I...”

“That’s alright, Sydney. I know what they did. He is a good boy...”

Then he looks up with an intensity I’ve never seen in him before. “Don’t sell it, please, don’t sell the diamond. I’ll pay you every month, and G-d willing, this should cover things. But please, please whatever you do, don’t tell my son! You’ve seen him grow up, you know it would break him...”

I promise to keep his secret. After paying the first installment, Shija conveys his gratefulness and leaves, pockets empty and heart full.

I stand there in shock for a few moments. After flipping my store sign to read ‘Sorry, We Are Closed,’ I take out the diamond, and it sparkles in the light and seems to wink at me—as if to say everything will be ok.

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And when Reva and Morris return to my store ten years later, they are indeed happier than I’ve ever seen them. They make me promise once more to reveal none of what has happened. When they leave the store they have a new ring, and I am left with the old diamond and a new promise.

In less than a week Shija shows up to pay his very last installment and reclaim the diamond. Just before he leaves, he looks at me closely and says, “Don’t say anything just yet, Sydney. I will wait to return this to Reva at the wedding of her youngest child.” The diamond winks at me from his palm as Shija leaves in a flurry of bells and spring breeze.

Another decade speeds by, and Morris is marrying off his third child. At the engagement party I watch Shija approach Riva and hand her a small brown package. She stares at it for a moment, and then they both cry and laugh at once. At the wedding I glimpse a familiar twinkle, and I know we have come full circle.

# Bob's Conundrum

by Miriam Schuster

The day I learned what love is was the day I died. Bob is a robot who works in the hospital doing the work of a nurse. Bob mostly does his work independently according to how he is programmed. Bob understands everything technologically because that is how he was made to function, but Bob does not understand many things that humans do.

Bob. Bob is placed down. On the cold, clean surface. To start a 14-hour day. Work in the update monitor. Troubleshooter leaves Bob there alone. Bob sees blue lights pass him. Into the next network. Bob waits for Troubleshooter to exit and leave Bob there.

Bob is a learning robot. Bob's Troubleshooter enters "T-A-B." Bob is transferred from file to file. Bob's micro-cameras turn on. Alert. Bob is coming. Bob's adapters download. Bob's monitors go beep, beep, beep. Bob installs red pills into files. Have to close grey cursors. And e-mail out. "Page up" and Bob up more. Five feet six inches and two millimeters. Calculating. Calculating. Bob is ready. Space, space, space... Bob opens and closes cursors to seal plastic. Bob closes 301 red pills. Bob in shut down mode for 45 seconds and 38 milliseconds. Bob does not want to heat up.

Bob holding  
Baby. Bob glares  
at Baby. Bob  
searching system.  
Bob can't process  
Baby.

Bob feels beat, beat in bottom wires. Bob thinks it is his battery. Bob feels going back to Cyberspace. Bob can enjoy life with big robots and small robots that all burned up. Bob cannot go. Bob has to see. Wrinkled multicolored CPUs. To cheer up and serve. Bob needs to fill recycle bin. Bob would not get updates at the end of work. Bob not useful for two thousand dollars' worth if don't finish quota. Bob's CPU fizzes. Bob's battery warms up inside. This could not continue.

Bob cuts work. Two minutes and 49 seconds. Bob transfers networks. Bob sees green lady. "HELLO." Green's CPU turns. Bob pats Green's cursor. Screen goes up. Green sits. Green gets up on wires. Green's cursors on Bob's adapters. Bob feels beat, beat in adapters. Green's plugs move. Green's plugs go one before the other. Troubleshooter puts Green in shut down mode. Bob feels beat, beat in modem. Bob is almost convinced it is the battery. Bob places cursor on Green's CPU. "HOT. FEVER." Bob gets

a red pill for Green. Green's micro-cameras close.

Bob transfers networks to Baby's network. Baby is new. Bob gets liquid. Bob puts liquid into Baby's disc drive, which the humanoids call a mouth. One ounce, two ounce, three ounce... Calculating. Calculating. Seven ounces down. Sound comes from Baby with air. Bob reconnects wires to Baby's disc drive.

"S-O-U-N-D." Bob's CD player plays a slow song. Baby shuts down. Bob feels beat, beat in CD player. Bob is getting nervous. Bob is sure it his battery. Bob has no one to tell. Bob's troubleshooter is not there to know. Bob starts to feel warmer. Bob smooths Baby's CPU. Bob W-A-L-K-S. Bob starts to "page down."

Bob holding Baby. Bob glares at Baby. Bob searching system. Bob can't process Baby. Bob's CPU twisted. Bob doesn't know how Baby came. Bob sees innocence. Bob sees youth. Bob sees potential in Baby. Bob doesn't understand. Bob's CPU searching, searching. Trying to process. "ERROR. UNDEFINED CHARACTERS."

"Big Baby" transfers networks to Baby's network. "Big Baby" glares at Baby. "Big Baby" processes Baby. "Big Baby" contacts baby. "Big Baby" extends hand. "UNDEFINED CHARACTERS." Bob can't place it. Bob does not understand "Big Baby's" disc drive shape. Bob's CPU searching, searching. Trying to process. "Big Baby" L-O-V-E-S Baby." "ERROR. ERROR. CPU MALFUNCTION." Bob trying hard to understand.

"I love you, my baby! Mom always loves you. Sleep well, my baby, because I love you so much!" Bob trying hard to understand love. Bob's CPU does not know love. Big Baby loves Little Baby. Big Baby understands love. Little Baby understands love. Bob does not.

Bob breaks (stops). Can't put one plug before the other. Slowing down. Beat beating speeding up. Bob feels like leaving. Going to Cyber-space. Bob can't put baby down. Baby going to fall. Beat, beat coming stronger. Bob falls down. Baby between Bob's wires. Bob can't up. Bob can't right. Bob can't left. Bob is frozen. Bob wants Troubleshooter to come. Bob's lights flash. Bob's micro-cameras turn. Bob's wires boil. Bob's modem beeps. Bob's battery beats. Bob's battery pack burnt. Bob is gone. Bob burnt up.





# The Day I Learned A Universal Language

By Miri Fried

# One is not JUST One

by Leah Steinberg

The day I learned one isn't JUST one: At the age of four, I realized something was not right. As I settled onto my grandfather's pillow to listen to his bedtime story, my grandfather slid his arm under my little body and lovingly cradled me to him. I knew right away that it was different from when my mommy cradled me—her embrace was tighter and she wrapped me in both arms. I sat up to see what was wrong, which was the moment when I realized: Zaidy cradled me in one arm because he only had one arm.

When my grandfather was around 20 years old, he was in a tragic bike accident. This is when he lost his arm—and not just his arm, but his right arm. (Of course he was a righty.) I would assume that most people put in this situation would give up; they would accept that they had become handicapped and learn to rely on others to do what they could no longer

do. My grandfather was not this way, however. He was strong-willed and simply thankful for the one arm he did have. He never let the fact that one was missing become a handicap.

.....  
**How is it that this man with one arm did what the two of you with four arms could not!?!?**

After his accident, my grandfather went on to get married and have a family of 10 children. He learned to write and drive and work with only one arm. He tied his own shoes and made his own tie. He cooked breakfast each day for himself and my grandmother.

My grandfather was told by two of the Gedolai Hador that because of his injury he was not required to put on tfillen shel yad.

Nevertheless, he did. He was not going to allow his lack of an arm be an excuse not to do mitzvah. Not only did my grandfather put on tfillen every day, he also never asked for help doing it. He would swing his arm around and around, sometimes tying the end to a door knob for support, until the tfillen was fully wrapped around his arm. And then he would tighten it with his teeth, never complaining or asking for help.

There was nothing my grandfather did not or could not do. In fact, he did more with his one arm than most people do with two. He helped the local yeshiva when a bus driver called in sick—the principal actually called him “the best bus driver.” He was the manager of a bungalow colony for years, doing whatever had to be done to keep the place running smoothly.

Whether it was getting rid of a beehive or replacing a light bulb, he would do it himself. When a bunch of yeshiva bachurim were being attacked by a group of rowdy street kids, my grandfather jumped in and broke up the fight; afterward, he carried one of the stronger kids straight to the police station with only one arm. My favorite story, though, is the story of when his family made aliya: my grandparents moved into a new neighborhood where phone lines were not put in place for over a year. This upset my grandmother, an American, greatly. When the phone company's employees finally reached my grandparents' home, they experienced some technical difficulties. My grandmother was told that they would need to come back another day to fix the problem, and she broke down in tears. Immediately, my grandfather grabbed his toolbox and fixed the problem. Upon hearing this news, the manager of the phone company rebuked his employees: "How is it that this man with one arm did what the two of you with four arms could not!?"

My grandfather cradled every grandchild that was born in his one arm. He played with each of us and even lifted us off the ground and over his good shoulder. Even toward the end of his life when he was much weaker, he held and loved each child no matter how heavy they were.

I will forever be in awe of my grandfather's strength and all he was able to accomplish in his lifetime. Although I only remember him when he was already much weaker, I was fortunate to witness his love for his children and grandchildren. The day of my grandfather's levaya and during the week of his shiva, I listened to person after person praise what he had done for them and for everyone he had come in contact with. All spoke about his accomplishments. None mentioned a disability.

That was the day I learned that one is not JUST one.

# Untied

by Gabrielle Hawk

The day I learned how to tie my shoes was the day I ran away from home. Yesterday, Mommy made brownies. Mommy didn't let me lick the spoon; she said I could get "samolella."

"But Layla's mommy lets her!" I cried.

Mommy answered, "If Layla's mommy is better, go find a mommy like her."

"I will!" I yelled. I ran upstairs to my bright pink room and took my silver Cinderella bag out of my closet. I made sure to pack the most important things: my tiara, my Barbie, my tutu and my princess shoes. I zipped up my bag and put on my favorite pink bracelet with the sparkly hearts. I got

this bracelet from Zoe. She gave it to me as a present at my birthday party. Zoe is the nicest friend, but one time she was mean to me. She didn't give me a lollipop when she had two of her own!

I opened my  
shoelaces and tied  
them again – so I  
wouldn't forget.

When I got to the front door, I tried pulling the handle but the door didn't open. The top lock was locked, and I couldn't reach it! Mommy saw me trying to open the door and unlocked it for me. I stopped walking for a minute before I left the porch.

"Mommy, where is a different mommy?" I asked. Mommy told me to go down the block and I'll for sure find one. I started walking down the pathway to the sidewalk just as Daddy came home.

I looked at him and said, "I'm running away!" As I spoke, I tripped over my shoelaces and fell down. I started crying because I scraped my knee and it burned. Daddy told me to wait a second, and he ran back inside. No one else was outside of the house. "What if a robber comes and takes me?" I thought. Just then, Daddy came back with a Band-Aid and Neosporin. He cleaned my knee and gave it a kiss. Daddy knows just how to make everything better!

"I love you Daddy! You're bestest than Mommy," I said. He looked down at my shoes.

"You can't go looking for a new mommy with untied shoelaces,"

Daddy told me. He sat down next to me and tied my shoe.

“There, all done. Now you can continue your search,” Daddy said as he stood up next to me. Daddy looked like a giant when I was sitting. When Daddy lifts me on his shoulders, I can almost touch the ceiling! One time, Daddy put me on his shoulders in the swimming pool and then I jumped off. I reached the sky when I jumped.

I did not stand up. “But... What if my shoelaces open again? What should I do?” I asked.

“How about I teach you how to tie your shoes?” Daddy replied, “That way, if your shoes untie again you can fix them all by yourself.”

“Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!” I told him. Daddy sat down again and untied my shoelace. He began to show me what to do.

“First, you cross the two laces like an ‘X’. Then, you put one lace through the ‘X’ and pull both ends tightly. Next, you make two bunny-ears, like this. Cross the bunny ears and put one through this ‘X’. Then, pull both bunny ears until the knot is tight.” Daddy made everything look so easy. Now it was my turn to try. I started to cry.

“What’s wrong?” Daddy asked.

“I can’t do it!” I cried. Daddy showed me the steps again and then did them with me.

After about a gazillion times, I did it all by myself! Daddy gave me a huge smile, and I gave him a hug and a kiss. I opened my shoelaces and tied them again – so I wouldn’t forget. Josh told me one time that it’s impossible to forget how to ride a bike. Then he fell off his bike, and I told him he forgot how to ride it. Josh got very angry at me, but I just told him the truth.

“Should we show Mommy that you know how to tie your own shoes?” suggested Daddy.

“YES!” I cheered. I ran all the way up the path and onto the porch. I only stopped for a second to make sure Daddy was following me. He was a mile away, but I could see him bringing in my silver Cinderella bag.

# My Grandmother's Pearls

by Baila Schuster

The day I learned the significance of pearl earrings was the day I received my first pair.

As I sit in my grandmother's den, amongst hand knitted pillows and floral couches, the aroma of fried chicken and baked cookies permeates the air. I watch my grandmother's large figure hustling around the kitchen putting the chicken into the pan, causing a sizzling crackling sound as she throws me one of her gorgeous radiant smiles. Her chocolate brown eyes sparkle as she cooks, her blonde wig is perfectly in place and her red checkered apron is wrapped around her flowing silk dress. Watching her, I can't help but run over and give her a hug. Her enveloping warmth spreads through me, and I can feel her soft skin on my own. A warm tingly feeling spreads throughout my body like butter on a piece of toast.

The table is set with glowing candles in the middle. The lights are dim, and my grandmother and I sit down. I can feel the anticipation build-

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The pearls on  
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ing up in me when I see the little red velvet case sitting next to my plate. My eyes glitter in the candlelight as my grandmother wraps her arms around me. I squeeze back as tight as I can and pull her close, taking in the special feeling of being together with her. My face is buried in my grandmother's chest, and I feel her gently placing a soft, oval shaped object in my hand. I lift my head up and find the little red case sitting in the center of my small palm. I gasp in delight. Slowly, I open the velvet case. Inside are the two most gorgeous pearl earrings I have ever seen. They gleam in the light and smile up at me.

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Now, as I stand in front of the mirror placing them into my ears for the first time, my fingers brush gently over the smoothness of the stones. Their coolness on my ears feels like the first whispers of autumn on my face. My fingers linger on the stones, making the pearls' weight more pronounced. I feel my heart contract as the tears fall from my eyes with no end. The pearls on my ears become a creamy, watery blur, which reminds me of

the frosting on my grandmother's mouthwatering cakes. I can no longer eat another one of those cakes or watch my grandmother in her kitchen as she makes some of her tantalizing fried chicken. I can no longer lick the batter of the frosting for her cakes or sneak a few bites of the raw dough. I can no longer laugh together with my grandmother in her kitchen as we swing around mixing batters or cooking up new recipes. Staring into the mirror at my tear streaked face, I can feel my grandmother's embrace through the weight of the pearls on my ears. As I prepare to pay my final respects, I think about my loss, and I realize I am my grandmother's pearl.

THE DAYI

80



# 3

Section

**To Be Brave**

LEARNED

# To Be Brave

by Tamar Skydell, Editor

Winston Churchill spoke of bravery, saying: “Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.” This quote pertains to the inner spirit and valor of mankind, which is the theme of this section of the Literary Journal.

In “Living as a Traitor, Dying as a Hero” by Esther Rothman, the protagonist battles with her conscience as she struggles to watch the terrorization of the Jews during the Holocaust. Esther uses crisp, precise diction to display the honorable valor of the young soldier.

In “The Exodus,” Miriam Liebling recounts the horrifying experience that Moshe and the Jews went through while leaving Egypt. Her piece shows how the Jews’ unyielding faith allowed them to act bravely during this most treacherous time.

Bryna Greenberg’s “Walk a Mile in Ruby’s Shoes” is a touching story that truly conveys the hardships that African Americans faced during the mid-1900’s. Bryna undertakes the difficult challenge of capturing the Southern voice of her young character Ruby, and she does so beautifully. Ruby’s naiveté of the unfortunate situation she faces (being an African American student in an all-white school) is truly endearing, but her bravery and determination is what captivates the reader.

“The Last Moment” by Ayelet Buchen is a heart-wrenching piece about a young, troubled mother who struggles with giving her child away. She knows that she has no other choice, but she can’t bear the thought of living without her precious baby. The character’s bountiful love seeps through Ayelet Buchen’s descriptive language.

In “The Azuretti Struggle,” Ava Katz confronts the hardships of an illiterate young man who yearns to go to university. Academic ambition is not common in the Azuretti, where most men farm all day, but this character is anxious to pursue his dreams. The voice of the work is written in a childish form; in this way, Ava properly portrays her character’s level of literacy, as he has never (before) received a proper education.

In “Broken Glass Can be the Clearest,” Sara Ben-Zvi offers a vivid description of an alcoholic’s journey to sobriety. The jargon of Sara’s piece rings true; you are able to visualize this recovered alcoholic speaking comfortably among her peers. The work is about a very brave woman, and taking on this topic in and of itself is also quite brave.

Bravery comes in all shapes and sizes—from the small girl heading to a strange, new school to the mother sacrificing for the sake of her newborn. All of the pieces in this section showcase bravery and make us realize that courage can sometimes derive from the places and people we least expect.



# The Day I Learned

## Not To Cry

By Rivka Schuster

# Broken Glass Can be the Clearest

by Sara Ben-Zvi

“The day I learned to hope was the day all hope seemed lost. Hope was playin’ hide-and-go-seek with me, and sure as anything didn’t seem to want to be found, but I persisted, and well, they don’t call me World’s Greatest Seeker for nothing. ‘Seek it out and you shall find it,’ or something like that...

“That day should’ve been when I hit rock bottom. The bills were pilin’ up, the electricity was already disconnected, my minimum wage cashier job seemed to be goin’ nowhere (so much for that promotion to manager that was ‘sure to come any day now’), and to top it all off, Billy came home cursin’ like a truck driver. I almost saw red and slapped him clean on the mouth, tellin’ him he’d better watch himself, but he just laughed harshly and let loose another expletive before walkin’ out the door. I was close, so close to my breaking point. Part of me wanted to just put my head down on the table we’d gotten on clearance at Ikea and sob my poor little heart out, but the table was barely sturdy enough to carry the weight of an apple, never mind the heavy load of my problems. Cryin’s not my way, anyhow.

Life got better,  
kinder, when I  
became better,  
kinder.

“The Grey Goose I’d stored away rose unbidden in my mind, deceptively whispering it had all the answers in my ear. Just one shot, and your problems won’t bother you no more, honey, it crooned. Heck, have enough and there won’t be any problems...

“The mind can play funny tricks on itself when it’s desperate, and I was half convinced to do what it took to become bold and stupidly kill every last shred of self-worth I had in the process—when I stopped. I did cry now, but it was a cleansing cry, a healthy cry. A river of tears that washed away all last vestiges of the life I’d been living ‘til then.

“I rose, but this time I was truly stronger, this time I was truly bold, not ranting in a half drunken stupor at the way the world’d been cruel to me ‘til then. Because I realized the only one bein’ cruel to me right then was me.

“I stood up at a time when it was so easy to sit down. Do you know how I solved my problems?” She paused, sweeping the room with

her eyes, taking in every almost imperceptible nod, all the emotions contained in the souls gathered. “I solved them by takin’ responsibility for them. And when I started to sort them out, and as an effect, the creditors got to see me lucid and grantin’ myself respect, they began to respect me too. I came into work on time with my uniform clean and a serious sort of smile on my face. Slowly, the lights got turned back on.” She closed her eyes for a moment, and when she reopened them the audience felt the power in her words.

“And heat, the heat felt so good. I didn’t need any liquid strength to approach people to help me put my life back together, because honestly the people I would’ve approached then would’ve sooner burnt me to the ground than build me up. We moved away from our hole in the wall to a newer, rent controlled place that, while smaller, was in an area where the lovely plants we smelled were legal. I got Billy into a program too. Life got better, kinder, when I became better, kinder. Because though it’s easy to blame the world for your problems, sometimes Life functions as a mirror: to find the problem, just look. If you’re ready to be honest, at first it may be painful but that’s a sign you’re growin’, goin’ in the right direction. It’ll get better, because you’ve found the path that stupidity like liquor makes elusive – yes, honey, then you’ll have found it – the road to redemption. The journey along it is exhilarating.”

She sat, and all those gathered, nameless recovering alcoholics burst into applause.

# The Exodus

by Miriam Liebling

The day I learned my grandchildren would live to see the redemption was today, as my beautiful family gathers around the rickety table to celebrate the holiday of Pesach for the very first time. With haste, we eat the savory lamb my daughter Rivka prepared. For, in a few hours, our great leader Moshe will guide us to freedom. We have been persecuted by Pharaoh and his advisors. They have forced my dear family and brethren to do backbreaking work every day. If not for Shifra and Puah, six of my grandsons would have been drowned in the Nile. Those sacred women saved them. They saved me. They saved my future. It is because of my precious grandchildren that I have never lost hope. It is because of them that I have believed with complete faith that G-d was, is, and will always be with us. And that one day, He will reveal Himself to us, the Chosen nation, and to all the nations of the world – for all to witness His glory.

Today is that day. Moshe is informing all the Jews of our imminent flight from Mitzraim.

Today is that day. Moshe is informing all the Jews of our imminent flight from Mitzraim. He is telling us to bring our livestock, belongings, and the riches we retrieved through the Plague of Darkness as G-d promised. We are headed into the wilderness. We are headed to the land of our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov. We are headed to the Holy Land. We are headed to the land flowing with milk and honey. We are headed to freedom. We are headed home.

We walk quickly through the desert, vigilantly watching our surroundings. As the warm sand seeps between my toes, I grow more and more fatigued. My knees begin to shake with weakness when I smell the unleavened bread and I must take a moment to rest. Suddenly, we hear a stampede of horses and chariots coming from behind. We all look back to see a cloud of sand surrounding our approaching enemy. A familiar voice cries out inaudible words and instinctively, we get up and run.

We are traveling as fast as we can, and yet, it still isn't fast enough. Eventually, we reach the Yam Suf, and all hope is lost. The Mitzrim are gaining on us from behind, and there is a large body of water in front of us, preventing us from proceeding. Most pray, others panic. Moshe signals for

us to walk directly into the sea. All I can do is stand and stare in disbelief. Would G-d want us to walk into an abyss of death?

One brave soul by the name of Nachshon ben Aminadav obeys Moshe's command and walks into the raging waters of the sea. When the water reaches his neck, I feel a strong wind stirring from the east.

Then, it happens. The sea, it—it...it splits! I watch as the seabed dries up creating a clear path on which we will walk. The waters stand up to form twelve columns of blue, transparent walls for each shevet. My family follows Moshe into the sea, as we too are from Shevet Levi.

Through the loud wind I hear the small wail of my granddaughter Chana, begging for something to eat. I look through my belongings to check for food...even just a cracker. I have nothing. From the periphery, I see...an orange? There is an orange in the wall of water! I hesitate...will the wall break down if I try to reach for it? Chana cries again – I have no choice. I roll up my sleeve and plunge my hand through the wall. I grab the orange and quickly pull my hand away. When the wall retains its structure, we begin to search for more food. These fruits, they are...juicy and sweet and all that is good!

We're nearly across the sea when the winds pick up again. We walk faster. I look back when I hear cries and screams, fearing we left someone behind. The wind...it's so loud, I can't make out who it is. I glance over my shoulder and for the last time I see the Mitzrim. Finally, we reach land and the walls of water collapse behind us.

Today is the day of renewed hope. Today is the day G-d freed us. Today is the day G-d split the sea. Today is the day our oppressors were wiped off the face of the earth. Today is the day to sing praise, because today is the day, G-d saved me.



# The Azuretti Struggle

by Ava Katz

The day I learned to learn is today. Today I will learn my English proper. I will learn everything. It has not been an easy time getting here, not at all. They don't want me to be learning, my parents that is. They want me to be on the farm, to work is what they say I can succeed. But I know that they not telling truth. That I can succeed in this way too.

I want to graduate the University. The Mrs....I mean the teacher... she graduated the University. She smart. Maybe soon I be smart. Today the lesson start. English, arithmetic, science, geography, history of the world, all the lessons teacher told us will start today. This she tells us will prepare for the University afterwards. Ma and Pa not seeing that there is an after. They say that this is waste. Waste of time, waste of space, waste of our beans.

The beans is maybe what hurts Pa most. Teacher must eat, but why must she eat our beans he asks. Our beans pays for our land. Our beans now pays for her teaching too, but her teaching, Pa not understanding why we need her teaching. Pa say to be man is to make life from the land. I think maybe to be man is to succeed. And to succeed...teacher says to succeed is to finish. I want to finish the University. That is how I will be man.

Why? Ma ask all the time. Why want to finish the University? She not understand.

Why? Ma ask all the time. Why want to finish the University? She not understand. The University is how I will one day leave Azuretti. Azuretti not bad place but in Azuretti people not valuing the knowledge. They say to make beans, to have family...this is all that is need. I need more. The people in Azuretti, they good people, but they not smart people. They not making mosquito nets to protect them, they waiting for others to give this to them. To not be able to protect from mosquitos, this is bad.

In my future I will be able to make the mosquito nets. To see the problems and do the fixing. At the University they will teach how to do this. There will be classes and there will be learning. And I be a part of all this. I will be part of this even if Ma and Pa not understand why. Part of the learning to do, learning not to wait for others to do instead. The University is how I learn this. Today is the day this learning starts. The day I learned to learn is today.



# The Day I Learned To Read

By Miriam Schuster

90

# The Princess and the Dragon

by Meryl Rubin

The day I learned that a princess can escape a dragon, Mother cried a lot. She held me close, so close to her I could hardly breathe, and cried and cried. She kept crying and all I wanted was to make it stop—make it all go away. Stop crying, Mommy, I said. It's okay. But I knew that it wasn't.

Teacher was in a good mood that day. Put your books away, she said, it's time to color. I loved to color. I loved to draw my castle, the one that I lived in. I would draw the ballroom, where me and my other princess friends would put on our puffy pink dresses with the sparkles on them and dance and twirl around so our petticoats would puff around us like a cupcake. I would draw Father's Royal Chambers, where he let me put on his big shiny crown that was so heavy I felt my head would fall off. That day I drew for what felt like hours. And then the dragon came.

He was standing by the doorway. His face looked mean and rotten and evil. Right away, I knew he was a dragon. Nobody else knew it, but I knew. Princesses have to know about dragons 'cuz then the prince comes and slays the dragon and saves the princess and lives happily ever after. But I knew that my prince wouldn't come that day. I would have to face the dragon on my own.

Everyone was screaming. They were yelling and crying and running, but I knew it wouldn't help. The dragon would still get them. There were lots of loud noises and big booms, and the room was shaking and bodies were falling everywhere. I was so scared, I wanted to scream and run like the rest of them. But I wasn't going to let him get me! I was smarter than that awful, disgusting, hideous, dreadful, dragon monster. And I knew if I would be noisy and loud and scared, the dragon would get me too. So I lied down real quiet, and I didn't even breathe. I pretended he already got me like the rest of them 'cuz then he wouldn't try and get me for real. I kept my eyes shut tight and didn't open them 'cuz I knew that things were gross and awful all around me. But I didn't cry. I was a princess, and princesses are supposed to be strong and brave.

Then it got quiet. The yelling and the screaming and the crying

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own.**

stopped and all I heard were some sirens from far away. I knew there was no more screaming ‘cuz no one was left to scream anymore, and even the dragon was gone ‘cuz I didn’t hear his evil voice. So I crawled out real quickly but quietly. I crawled and crawled, outside the classroom and into the hallway. I crawled over lots of scary stuff, but I didn’t think—I just kept crawling ‘till I knew I was safe. Then I ran and ran across the building, down the stairs and out the door.

They were all waiting for me outside. I ran to them. I couldn’t believe it was finally over. I couldn’t believe it. I wanted to vomit. All the big people kept saying stuff I couldn’t understand like “massacre” and “mentally ill” and “shooter.” There were cameras and TV people too, and I remembered last time I went with Mommy to the big city and saw TV people and got so excited, but this time I wasn’t excited at all. Sandy Hook massacre, the TV girl said, and Mommy just cried. All the noise and the crying and the sirens and the shouting were hurting my head, and I didn’t know what was going on. All I knew was that I was the only princess left. The others were dead. And I knew the dragon with the gun was dead, too.

# Living as a Traitor, Dying as a Hero

by Esther Rothman

The day I learned to trust my instinct was the day I died a hero. As I look down from heaven, I smile, knowing that I fulfilled my mission of truth. Beginning in 1932 when I lived in Frankfurt, I was influenced by the Nazi regime. When I was 7, I became a proud member of the Hitler youth groups. There I was taught that we were created to annihilate the Jews and serve Hitler's Germany with pride—that the Aryan race was superior and the Jewish race was inferior. The Nazi ideology also influenced my home. My mother would read me books every night that would show pictures of Jews with big noses and depict them as poisonous mushrooms. When I would walk in the streets with my mother and be greeted by a Jewish boy with brown hair and brown eyes, my mother would not even raise her head in response; she would spit on the floor. My father, who was an unsuccessful business man before the war, was appointed by the Nazi regime as a top commander in the Gestapo, the secret police that would kidnap, beat, and brutalize Jews for not following the Nazi rules. I never fully understood what the Nazis were doing to the Jews; my mother said they were sending them away to a different village where they would live and not bother us anymore. In my childhood, I never knew the truth; I was brainwashed by my parents, friends and country.

When I was 7, I became a proud member of the Hitler youth groups.

On a cool November night in 1938, the Nazis, led by father, burned down and shattered Jewish stores and prayer houses. The sky that night was filled with smoke. The air was filled with sounds of screams. My mother and father seemed pleased with what had happened all over Europe that night. I didn't know what to think: would we be pleased if our businesses were being destroyed?

In 1939, due to my father's powerful position, we moved to Warsaw, Poland. The next few years were pretty peaceful in Warsaw. I watched as Nazis arrested Jews, but it never seemed to me as anything significant. In 1940, when I was 15 years old, I noticed a brick wall being built by the Jews in our town. From what I was told, the Nazis were treating the Jews pretty well, giving them work during the economically troubled war years. However, when the wall was complete, I watched as thousands of Jews,

carrying as many of their possessions as they could, enter a small secluded area. The Jews, all 400,000 of them, were cordoned off into what was called a “ghetto,” a small area surrounded by brick wall and barbed wire. No one was allowed to leave the ghetto without permission. I saw no more Jewish boys or families on the street; they were all locked up in there.

In 1943, when I became 18, I was appointed a Nazi soldier. As I got older, I became more aware of what the Nazis were actually doing to the Jews: killing many and sending others to concentration camps. Why would we, the German people, do such terrible things to a nation that never bothered us? I silently vowed to use my position as a soldier to save as many innocent Jews as I could.

Our commander positioned my unit by the entrance to the ghetto. I never went inside the ghetto; my job was to make sure that no one escaped. I can say with a clean conscience that they never did. I technically never allowed anyone to “escape”; I merely enabled the Jews to enter and exit with necessary provisions that the Nazis were not providing them. Medicine, potatoes, bread, and many children entered and exited the ghetto through my gate. Every night, I came home satisfied that my defiance had enabled some Jews to escape the ghetto and others to be a little more comfortable with the items they brought back inside.

On a regular afternoon in April, during my posting, I suddenly heard gun shots from inside the ghetto. I heard Nazi officers scream “Helfen! Helfen!” I looked into the ghetto: there was total confusion. I could see Jews with guns, shooting at Nazi officers; they were rebelling, actually fighting for their freedom, trying to stop their persecution.

Without a thought in my head, I ran home, changed out of my green uniform and black boots and put on old worn clothing, a cap, and charcoal on my face and skin. I looked in the mirror at my lean build; I knew I could pull this off.

I returned to the ghetto walls once more. Finding no officers there, I quickly entered the ghetto without resistance and began shooting at my fellow countrymen: killing any Nazi in sight. A few Jews surrounded me; I recognized them from my ghetto post. At that moment, we became fellow warriors. Together, we fought, side by side. We were one united front—until I heard the sound. I saw the bullet as it gently entered my chest. I fell to the pavement and watched in a haze. Black Nazi boots approached my body. I looked up and thought my last thought: I used to be one of you. But now I am proudly dying in defense of an innocent people.



# The Day I Learned To Hope for Peace

By Miri Fried

95

# The Last Moment

by Ayelet Buchen

The day I learned that I loved my son more than anything in the world was the last time I ever saw him.

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I dragged one foot in front of the other, my arms aching from the bundle I carried, yet never loosening my grip on the most valuable thing in the world. I walked with no desire to reach my destination: the end of happiness, the end of the world, the end of the life I had always yearned for. I would never recuperate from this. Never. But I kept walking, holding back the tears the entire way.

I would never hear his laugh, never see him smile. I wouldn't even get to see his beautiful blue eyes just once more. The facets of his personality would remain a mystery to me. I would never see him again. I carefully examined his face for the last time, the face that was already dedicated to memory.

Everything about him – his beauty, his personality, the happiness he brought – was for someone else to enjoy. Not for me. He no longer belonged to me. He belonged to a stranger.

But that stranger would care for him. That stranger would nurture him and love him. It would never be the same love that I had for him, though: the love that was stronger than any other feeling in the universe. The love that he would not remember. The love that brought me to do this against my will—that forced my legs to keep moving, one in front of the other. It would never be the same love, but it would still be better for him. The stranger would fulfill his needs, a task that though I would readily give anything to accomplish, was impossible for me to do.

I knew it was impossible all along, but I tried to do it for two weeks. I tried to keep him. And although I could not care for myself alone, for two selfish weeks I tried to care for him as well.

The joy I experienced over those two weeks cannot be compared to any other time of my life. No matter how hard they were, I was elated every

He no longer  
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He belonged to a  
stranger.



time I looked at his face. But every time I did that, I saw his face getting thinner by the day, and I realized that I was being cruel to him. Life could not continue the way it was. I was forced into this journey.

I climbed the five stairs to the red brick building with my eyes still focused on him, all the while wishing the journey was longer. I only realized that I had arrived at my destination when there was nowhere left to walk. I looked up at the wooden door and lost the war against my tears. They gushed uncontrollably, spilled over my eyes and poured down my cheeks, making his blanket wet.

“I love you, Sammy,” I whispered in his ear. I hugged him tightly, more fiercely than I ever had before. For a moment I stood there, sobbing quietly to myself, savoring this last moment. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed the sun rising on the horizon. He would wake up soon, as would the entire neighborhood. This last moment would have to end before then.

I gently put my precious Sammy on the orphanage doorstep and rang the bell. I hid in the bushes and watched, tears streaming down my face, as a woman opened the door. She saw Sammy on the ground. She gasped, picked him up with care, and searched for the person who had left him there. All too quickly, her unsuccessful search was over, and she took my son inside, closing the door behind her.

Then I left my hiding spot and slowly walked away, leaving my life behind.

# Walk a Mile in Ruby's Shoes

by Bryna Greenberg

The day I learned to be brave, I thought it would mean giving up my pride. My name is Ruby. Today is the first day of school. Most girls and boys are excited, but not me. Mama's laid out a dress for me. It's white as the moon on a clear black night, and it's starched to the point that it's stiff in my hands. Daddy walks past my room and says I'll be the prettiest one in the whole 'tire first grade. But I know he don't want me going there. I don't belong in the white children's school.

It's called William Frantz Elementary, and I'm the first colored child to go there. Mama says it's 'cause I'm special, and the government thinks I'm smarter than all the other kids. I fill my cheeks with air and smooth out my dress. Maybe, they got nicer books than my old school did, without all those words scribbled on them in crayon, or maybe they got newer chairs without cracks in the seats.

The old wooden clock says there's still a half an hour till it's time for me and my mama to go. I sit by the kitchen table with my daddy while he eats his breakfast. Daddy has to leave for work, so he scrapes away the rest of his oatmeal. He tells me that he's the proudest daddy in the whole New Orleans.

"I love you, baby," he smiles as he pulls on his green cap.

"Love you too, Daddy," I tell him back with the best Ruby Bridges smile that I got. Mama walks into the room and hands me a box wrapped in pale pink paper. I pull off that paper all at once. Underneath is a shoe box. Mama pulls out a pair of new shoes.

"I thought you'd like them. It's a back to school present for my brave little girl." I throw my arms 'round Mama's neck and whisper thank you. They're polished and got that woody new shoe smell. I walk 'round the kitchen listening to them clack against the tiles till we hear a honk from outside. There are three men waiting in a shiny black car.

"Who are those big men, Mama?"

"Just some men that are going to drive us to school, baby, that's all." Mama calls to my brother and sister to be good for Miss Taylor and helps me into the car.

The men are dressed in gray suits and hats that shadow their eyes.

"Don't leave the car until I open the door." The one with gray hair

turns around and starts giving us instructions.

“I’ll be walking behind you. There will be two more men in front of you. Whatever you do, don’t look back at the people.” As we’re getting closer to the school, I’m sure it must be Mardi Gras. A crowd of people is swarming the street by the school. There are men and women, chanting and cheering, just like a New Orleans’ party. When I get a better look, I realize this ain’t no party. A white lady comes up to our car with a black doll in a little wooden coffin. I start praying ‘cause I ain’t ever been so scared. The eyes of those people are wild with fury.

There are three other black children in New Orleans who are going to a white children’s school today, too. I wonder if they also got rotten cabbage flying past their heads.

My men surround me as we shut the car doors. I repeat the gray haired man’s words in my head: Don’t look back, Ruby, don’t look back... I can feel all their eyes following me, like they’re waiting for me to cry or burst into flames. But I march with the men and squeeze my Mama’s hand, my head high like a soldier. Mama told me last night that I’m gonna be an inspiration. Right now, that’s the last thing I feel like. There are three other black children in New Orleans who are going to a white children’s school today, too. I wonder if they also got rotten cabbage flying past their heads. We push through the crowd till we reach the school steps. A group of policemen stops us as we start up.

“I’m sorry, but by state law you are not allowed in.”

“Thank you, sir, but by permission from the President of the United States, we are allowed inside,” the leader of my protectors replies smoothly, producing a U.S Deputy Marshal badge from his wallet.

The police step aside to let us through. The building looms over me, challenging me to go inside. Mama tugs my hand. “Come on, Ruby,” she whispers.

I grip her hand tighter and drag my feet inside. As we head to the front office, there are mothers pulling their kids out like I’ll make them sick

or something. Some teachers are leaving too. They don't want me here.

The head Marshal tells me that we're gonna wait in the principal's office. Mama's lips are shut in a tight line, her hands folded in her lap. We watch mothers storm out one by one with their children, until there are no kids left in the school. Then it's just me, my Mama, the Marshals, the principal, and an angry mob outside. So we wait. 9:00 comes 'round, and we're still waiting. 10:00, 11:00, 1:00, 2:30 roll away slowly on the ticking hands. Finally, the long screech of the bell seems to slow down time. Mama and I stand up, my hand in hers, ready for the hatred behind those closed doors.

As we walk past the empty classrooms, I imagine my best friend Sonny behind that wooden door, holding a red lunch box, her shoes tapping against the floor as she runs to go catch the bus with all the other kids. The tapping stops for a moment, and Sonny turns around.

"Ruby, come on, don't you wanna play?"

"Maybe later," I whisper. The thought of playing with Sonny, and all my colored friends in the playground, the white kids running and laughing, holding hands with us, causes an ache in my chest that I know won't go away for a while.

Mama's voice pulls me back to reality.

"What?" I ask.

"I said, Ruby, come on. It's time to go home now."

I take one last look at Sonny, but she's already gone.

We go down the front steps back to the shiny black car. Mama covers my ears as we pass through the crowd. We slide into the car and let out a breath. I lean my head on Mama's arm while we back away from the shrieks and the posters. Mama turns to me and says, "Ruby, honey, what did you think of that place?"

"I don't know, Mama. I think I'll decide after school tomorrow," I reply with a teasing smile. Mama ruffles my hair and whispers, "I'm so proud of you."

After we get home, we eat dinner, and soon it's time for bed. Daddy tucks me in under my quilt with the pretty stitches and kisses me goodnight. There ain't a sound in the room except for the soft breathing of my sister and brother. I think about what I told Mama. I ain't gonna leave that school. And those people, they can't hurt me, 'cause I ain't done nothing wrong. I want everything the white kids have. Mama wants me to have an education, and maybe I want it too. So I'm gonna go back; I ain't giving up my pride.



SARAH SHUTYAK

# The Day I Learned That Words Can Kill

By Sarah Shutyak

THE DAYI

# 4

Section

## To Embrace Life

LEARNED

# To Embrace Life

by Matti Fuld, Editor

Dr. Seuss wrote: “Don’t cry because it’s over, smile because it happened.” This quote fits this section of the literary journal, as all of the authors show how the characters in their stories must learn to embrace life as it happens instead of just dwelling in the past.

In “The Passage of Time and Torches,” Aliza Lobell learns the hard lesson that our parents (and grandparents) cannot stay vibrant and youthful forever; however, this fact is reconciled by the knowledge that, as our loved ones grow older, they gain more and more happiness as they pass down the “torch of parenthood” to their young children. Through this nonfiction reflection, Aliza learns to embrace the natural cycle of life.

In “Letters to her Brother,” Shalva Adler writes in the voice of the historical figure of Annie Sullivan. Through intimate letters to her deceased brother, Annie shares how she thought her life was over until she became more and more successful in teaching her student, Hellen Keller. Because Annie embraced this difficult experience, she was able to live her last few years to the fullest.

Similarly, in “Chameleon” by Dina Rochel Blumenthal, the fictional character George realizes that once he is able to make a game out of his family’s constant moving, he is able to truly enjoy all of life’s changes. By the end of the story, George has truly matured by not letting the difficulties in his life bring him down but, rather, make him stronger.

In Sarah Farber’s “Close Your Eyes and See,” a nonfiction account, the author Sarah’s life is touched by Lavi, a man who, despite his blindness to the external world, thrives in a richer way than most seeing people do. Sarah learns that there is much more to see beneath the surface than what we can through our eyes alone.

In “One Dusty Old Book,” Rivka Salhanick introduces us to another real-life hero: Naomi, who is “first and foremost one who had the courage to change her life.” Rivka’s encounter with Naomi, a woman who is working toward converting to Judaism, is an inspirational tale of seeking deeper meaning from life through the embracing of religion.

Sadly, in some cases, people – like the main character in “The Most Patient Shadow” by Nechama Dembitzer – do not always have the spiritual or physical strength to make changes to embrace their life. They feel so defeated that there is nothing left to do except to wait for life to embrace



them, which, luckily, is exactly the case in Nechama's story. Life (personified) reaches out to a man when he needs it most.

Finally, Dini Raskin shows readers that there is always time (even if it is just the smallest increment) to seek forgiveness from the ones you love. Her compelling piece, "Everlasting," is told through the perspective of a clock who watches an elderly woman in a nursing home make amends with her daughters in the short time she has left on earth.

Sometimes people realize that in order to embrace life they need to make drastic changes, be it converting religions or making amends with the ones you love. Other times, people need to meet a stranger – a blind man, a disabled young girl, a soon-to-be-born baby – who gets them to realize life's most treasured secrets. All of the pieces in this section showcase opportunities to embrace life in all its myriad forms. From the happy to the sad, all of the writing here celebrates our greatest gift: Life.



# The Day I Learned To Tell Time

By Ava Katz

106

# The Most Patient Shadow

by Nechama Dembitzer

“The day I learned Life’s trust never dies was 10,950 days after I left Her behind.”

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It is the year 1975. Two prison guards are leading a young man, who looks to be in his late twenties, toward two towering metal gates. The shadow of a beautiful woman walks closely behind him. There is a deafening, grinding noise as the gates begin to swing inward. Suddenly, the two guards are on the floor and the young man is running, the fearless shadow following closely behind. Within seconds, ten guards pounce on him. He screams, “I am an innocent man!” But the guards are deaf to his words. They drag him toward the gates as he flails like a fish out of water, refusing to give up. He appears to be grasping for something behind him as he digs his heels into the dirt, but his will alone is not enough. With a thunderous boom, the gates slam closed behind him, leaving the shadow of a heartbroken woman outside the gates.

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It is the year 2005. An old man walks slowly toward two towering metal gates. The faded shadow of a woman lies crumpled outside the gates, but the old man is unaware of Her presence. He makes slow progress as the shadow of the woman begins to stir. With his glassy eyes, he tilts his head towards the setting sun. The warmth of the sun’s rays is unable to melt his rigid features, and he begins to mumble, “10,948, 10,949, 10,950...” He rubs his foot in the dirt, lost in thought. “10,950 scratches in the wall, one for each day trapped behind those gates. And nestled in each, was the misplaced hope that you would see Her again.” The shadow, with evident fatigue, brings Herself to her knees, but the man does not see Her. “But you were a fool. From the moment those gates closed behind you, She was already gone. You thought you knew Her. You were wrong. For She is a trickster; She raises you into the clouds, only to hurtle you straight back into the ground. Thirty years ripped off Her mask of perfection and revealed the many blemishes underneath.” The shadow tries to raise Her neck, but Her head is too heavy. She lowers

10,950 scratches  
in the wall, one for  
each day trapped  
behind those  
gates.



it, seeming defeated.

“Your prison cell’s wall had an insatiable hunger; with each mark you made in the wall, it devoured another part of you. In the first 365 days it fed on your hope. And the wall was energized from its hearty breakfast, for the moment.” The shadow is determined to rise. Again She tries to pick Herself up, but cannot. He is still oblivious to Her presence. “But soon, the wall’s stomach rumbled once again. This time it chose to snack on your identity: number 75126 was who you became. Alas, this meager lunch only whet its appetite; the wall was ready for a dinner feast. It first wined on your connection with others. In prison there were no friends, only those numbers that hurt you, and those numbers that watched you. And then the wall dined on your connection to Her, and you no longer felt Her presence. But like every dining connoisseur, the wall needed a fine dessert. And so it indulged in your color. It sucked from your mind the red of Her lips, the green of Her eyes, and the whiteness of Her teeth. Her face became grey—like the grey walls, grey floors and grey ceilings of your captivity. And soon the wall needed more. But there was nothing left inside of you for it to take.”

With renewed energy, the shadow heaves Herself up off the ground. The man takes a step forward, still unaware of Her existence. “And now your journey will continue. But one very different than the one you used to walk. You are now an empty man who will be traveling an endless and lonely road. You have no one left to welcome you on the other side of these gates. She straightens her back, standing tall. A beautiful smile is barely visible on her shadow face. Unless... He shakes his head. No, it can’t be. He raises his hand, signaling to the guards. The gates slowly open inward. “After 10,950 footsteps apart, could She still be waiting?” With his head down he walks forward. Straight into Life and Her open arms.

# The Passage of Time and Torches

by Aliza Lobell

The day I learned that my sister-in-law was expecting a baby created semi-seismic change in the order of my own little world. To be clear, most of that change is good. Especially because “night duty” does not figure to fall on me, I am totally excited to welcome a new little person into my family. But some of the change is actually unsettling, especially because it forces me to view members of my family in a different light.

On the one hand, it is hard to imagine what news could be more exciting than my brother having his first child, my parents anticipating their first grandchild or my grandparents (in this case, my father’s parents) welcoming their first great-grandchild. Especially because my parents and grandparents dedicate so much of their lives to us, how wonderful will it be

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our children and  
their children  
emulate the values  
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teach.**

for them to experience the creation of a new generation dedicated to the same ethics and ideals as their own! And, I find it adorable that my brother and sister-in-law are becoming “real” parents—and must accept all the responsibilities that come with that—and, no less importantly, that I finally am becoming an aunt.

Leaving aside the emotional joy that accompanies a new baby, generational perpetuation is so fundamental to Judaism. As Shlomo Hamelech writes in Mishlei, “Ateres zekeinim b’nai banim,” i.e., grandchildren (interestingly enough, not children) represent the crowning achievement of the aged. And correctly so, I would say. After all, the only way to gauge the strength of parental education is whether it stands the test of time. Success is thus measured by the desire of children to transmit to a third generation the education received from their parents. It is for this same reason that Shlomo Hamelech also writes—in this case, in Koheles—“VaChut Hame-shulash lo Bimhaira Yinaseik,” that the three-ply cord—which, according to one interpretation, is an allusion to three-generational education and tradition—cannot be rendered asunder.

Yet for all the human and religious exhilaration associated with the anticipation of a baby, I found myself strangely unsettled. That is because the event simultaneously signified, at least in part, a passing of the torch on

the part of older generations. Where I had previously looked to my parents and saw only vibrancy and youth, I now began to detect slight diminution of relevance in favor of my siblings and me. I appreciate that is the natural evolution of life. Yet I was not ready for it. And it bothered me. I pulled out my parents' wedding album to observe what they looked like twenty-five years ago. What I saw in their faces was unbridled excitement and anticipation of the future and of the family they would create together. I understood they did not become old merely because they're about to become grandparents. But I felt sorry for them because the torch of their youth burns less brightly now that their children have officially replaced them as the child-bearing generation.

I felt that twinge of sadness more keenly when I contemplated the impact of the news on my father's parents. Our family's relationship with them is the stuff of legend. They are a focal point of virtually every Yom Tov, of every vacation we plan, of virtually every important event in our lives. Indeed, nothing we plan fails to take into account the participation of my Grandma and Zaidy. They mean so much to me, and I want them to stay young and energetic forever. Maybe becoming great-grandparents will infuse them with even more energy and youth, but I worry just the same that being great-grandparents represents the passage of time. And that made me really sad (and even borderline depressed).

As I do invariably do when faced with emotional challenge, I called my Zaidy. No one gives me such clear perspective and balance. While he was part of my "challenge" in this instance, his advice was spot on, as usual. He fully understood what was bothering me (and, while he didn't say so, I sensed it was bothering him too). He didn't tell me not to feel bothered. As he explained to me, the passage of time is something we struggle with every day but manage to avoid thinking about. Life cycle events—even happy ones, like this one—force us to take note that a milestone has occurred and that time has passed. But he told me, "Aliza, the nachas and joy of blessings like these overwhelm any emotions to the contrary. This is what we all live for: To watch our children and their children emulate the values we have tried to teach. Trust me, nothing makes Grandma and me happier. And I know the same is true of your parents as well. So, let's focus only on this exciting news, and let's daven for the future excitement we will have together when you too are blessed to become a parent, and Grandma and I will be there to share that joy with you as well."

Did that make me feel better? It did to some extent, for sure. But it also made me grateful to have such special grandparents and to redouble my tefillos to retain the privilege of sharing my life with them for many years to come.



# The Day I Learned That Age Doesn't Fade Beauty

By Rachelle Chechik

# Close your Eyes and See

by Sarah Farber

The day I learned to truly see was the day I met Lavi. “Who is Lavi?” you ask. He’s an extraordinarily accomplished individual: an attorney, an ordained Rabbi, a popular lecturer on the Jewish international speakers’ circuit. And a blind man.

I met Lavi for the first time when my father invited him to spend a weekend at our home. I was about eight at the time and, at first, was a bit uncomfortable with the whole idea. I had never interacted with a blind man before, and I envisioned him banging into walls and bouncing around much like my brother’s battery operated bumper cars.

“Will I have to lead him around by the hand or, worse yet, need to help him go to the bathroom?!” I asked my mother with a mixture of queasiness and fear.

She dismissed my question with a curt, “Don’t be silly,” which only served to exacerbate my sense of dread at the impending encounter. Frankly, at the time, I thought my mother was every bit as anxious as I was at the prospect of hosting a blind man for an entire Shabbos.

On the Friday afternoon Lavi was scheduled to arrive, I helped my mother clean up around the house. I picked up loose toys hanging around the living room and den to make sure he wouldn’t trip and fall. We set an extra place setting at the Shabbos table in the space normally reserved for guests. This happened to be opposite the candelabra which held the Shabbos candles. How sad, I thought, that Lavi wouldn’t be able to appreciate the warm glow of the flames that always lent a festive ambience to our Shabbos meal.

Finally, Lavi arrived with my father. I watched uneasily from my bedroom window as my father led Lavi up the pathway to our house. Approaching the single step to our porch, my father advised Lavi of the obstacle and, as if on cue, Lavi walked up in lockstep with my father. Just like that, a blind man had entered our home.

He didn’t carry a walking stick, nor did he wear dark glasses. He looked completely normal. He was dressed in Shabbos clothing: navy blue

I see you,’ he  
said playfully,  
‘don’t think you  
can hide from me  
just because I’m  
blind!’



suit, crisp white shirt and a loud paisley tie with blues whites and reds. His head was slightly misshapen, the result, I learned, of a series of operations he underwent to remove a brain tumor. While the surgeries were successful in excising the tumor, they damaged his optic nerves leading to his total blindness at age twenty six.

I observed him from the top of the staircase, barely moving, the only sound coming from the soft brush of my frilly dress against the bannister.

“I see you,” he said playfully, “don’t think you can hide from me just because I’m blind!”

I was at once shocked and befuddled. How had he sensed my presence?

I cautiously made my way down the steps. Amazingly, he “looked” in my direction and seemed to follow my movements every step of the way.

“Don’t be shy little girl, I won’t bite.” Now how did he know I was a girl?

I reached the bottom of the staircase

“Hi, my name is Lavi,” he offered, in a most friendly way that dissolved any of the tension I had previously felt. “What’s your name; how old are you?”

“I’m Sarah, eight years old. How did you know about me?”

“Simple, I saw you,” he said, stretching his hand toward me.

I hesitated for a moment, but then placed my right hand in his palm. It was warm and comfortable. He held my hand in both of his and smiled, relishing the connection and seemingly reading my very essence.

“I see you like to play the piano,” he said.

Again, I was stunned by this revelation. But he quickly continued, “Actually, your father told me that about you, but I figured I’d freak you out a bit.”

I laughed in relief and at that moment was put totally at ease by this stranger I had just met for the first time.

Throughout the weekend I discovered Lavi’s multifaceted personality. As he sat opposite the candelabra, the flickering flames were reflected in the small pupils of his eyes. He couldn’t see the lights, but he appeared to bask

in their luminosity. His face seemed to radiate an otherworldly glow which amplified the intensity of the light in the room.

He showed us his deeply spiritual side, leading us in soul stirring Sabbath hymns. He also inspired us with personal stories of courage and hope that helped him overcome his handicap. Most amazing to me was that the serene smile he displayed upon entering our home never left his face. It was infectious. Looking around the table, I saw my mother and father, brothers and younger sister were all smiling, and so was I!

“I’m glad I’m here,” said Lavi, “this is a happy home.”

And that’s when I realized that the blind man who sat before me possessed far greater vision than the sighted people who surrounded him. His sight is not limited to the physical superficialities that the eye sees. He sees into the inner soul of everything he encounters.

After Lavi’s stay in our home, I reflected from time to time on our experience with him. Sometimes I close my eyes and try to sense the core of everything around me, much the way he does. Once in a while I feel am successful.

I think the most important lesson I learned from Lavi is that the unseen bonds that connect people to one another are the strongest of all. The powerful yet intangible emotions of sensitivity and love can bring us all together no matter how we look or what we wear.

So next time you meet some stranger for the very first time, try closing your eyes and saying, “I see you for who you really are.”

# Chameleon

by Dina Rochel Blumenthal

The day I learned that it is not so bad to be or not to be was the day that I started having fun.

As the son of a diplomat, I've been moved from country to country, from culture to culture almost a half a dozen times in my 13 years. Every place I moved, I was the new kid on the block, at a disadvantage in more ways than I could count. My name is George, pronounced “j aw r j.” It is a very common name. It really isn't very hard to say. And yet the Aussies couldn't manage to say the “r” sound in the middle of my name, so I was known as “j aaww j” during my stay in Melbourne, Australia. I was all of six years old at the time we moved there, and it was very important to me to

I was getting pretty good at this game I named ‘chameleon’...

sound like everyone else. Every day at school, I would closely observe my friends' mouths and try to figure out why they sounded different than me even though we were speaking the same language. Then, at night, when I was supposed to be brushing my teeth, I would stand in front of the mirror trying to imitate the way they shaped their words. I would practice out loud until I heard the telltale creaking of the stairs, indicating that my mother was on her way up to check on my progress. This was my routine for three months, until I finally mastered the accent—and we moved to

Germany.

No English, no matter how I spoke it, was useful in Germany. The Germans' didn't skip the “r” in my name; they changed my name completely! For some reason, George, spelled as George, was pronounced as “gay-org.” It took me several weeks to realize that I was to respond to this unfamiliar word. A severe lady in a tight blonde bun was hired to tutor me in German. It was hard to learn the new phonetics associated with this language, but after a few months, I was not so bad at all. I could now speak three languages – American English, Aussie English and German! I felt so accomplished and was certain that there was no other kid my age that could do the same. (Little did I know that I would be learning even more languages in the near future.)

After about two and a half years of living in Germany and eating

schnitzel, sauerkraut and knockwurst, my family moved again. And I had to start all over, get used to a new language and culture and, again, a new name. Thankfully, this time George sounded more familiar. The French pronounced it “zhorz.” Equally similar to “jawrj” as “jaawwj.” It was easy to get my name right, but neither American English, Aussie English nor German would be of any help here. My French tutor worked overtime, but he was impressed with my results. I sounded like a Parisian when I spoke French and could even imitate the way the French spoke English. I was getting pretty good at this game I named “chameleon,” so when I was informed by my parents that we would be moving again, I actually looked forward to the challenge.

In Uruguay, on my first day at school, my teacher pleasantly informed me in front of the entire class that in Spanish, George is usually spelled “Jorge.” The way the J and the G are placed in the name, they are both pronounced as “H,” and so I was to be called “Hor-hay.” I could understand why George, spelled as George with a “g” at its beginning might elicit various pronunciations for that first letter, but if George was now spelled Jorge, it would most definitely be easy to understand that it should be pronounced “Jawrj.” I found the situation hilarious and laughed so hard, that soon the whole class was laughing with me. Once I got settled in, I started borrowing books from the local library, and went on outings to discover Uruguayan culture firsthand. As Jorge, I developed a taste for chili and learned to dance the tango. I now had fancy moves and another language to add to my list of attributes.

My family’s last move was back here to the United States. Finally, I don’t have to adjust to a new language because we are, after all, Americans. But I had learned over the course of my journeys how much fun it is to be unique, and there is no way that I am going to blend in now. I want to stand out—I can pretend to be almost anyone I want, from almost anywhere in the world.

Now, who should I be?

# One Dusty Old Book

by Rivka Salhanick

The day I met Naomi was quite a regular Shabbos. I got to shul at approximately 9:20 and sat myself down next to a young woman. Although she was sitting, I could tell she was quite tall—willowy but definitely fit. She was wearing a flowing green skirt, brown knit sweater and pendant necklace. One thing about living in a small community is transparency, and I knew she was a stranger. After davening finished, I turned to take her sid-dur back to the shelves and introduce myself.

“Hi, I’m Rivka Salhanick. Nice to meet you. I don’t think we’ve met...”

“No, we haven’t. I’m Naomi Freeman. It’s my first time here.”

Cool. She has a typical Jewish name, although she was definitely from out of town.

I watched her throughout Kiddush. She seemed comfortable, listening to the Dvar Torah with her chin bent to the side, chatting with the ladies. Once the crowd around her had thinned, I slipped in to find out more. This is what I found out from my second conversation (if the introduction can be called a conversation) with her: Naomi is a car salesperson, she just moved into the green apartments on Goffe Street, and she was originally from Rapid City, South Dakota... South Dakota?

“How many Jews are in South Dakota? I can’t imagine there are very many...?” I said, curious as to the answer.

“Oh there are some there. A nice Chabad as well,” she said.

I stepped aside to let the remaining women introduce themselves, but a question was still left hanging on my tongue: “How in the world did you end up in New Haven?”

Naomi came to shul the next Shabbos, and many thereafter, awarding me the chance to continue my conversation with her. My question was soon answered: Naomi was a Christian. She was on the road to conversion and had come to New Haven to learn more about Judaism.

Then and there I learned to never judge a book by its cover.

Over two cups of peppermint tea and maple syrup brownies, she unraveled her exotic childhood. Naomi grew up in a family that called themselves Christian: “non-denominational, so not Protestant or Baptist or Lutheran, none of that. Just purely Christian.” However, her family was

one of the most religious in the area.

“Growing up in the middle of nowhere,” Naomi announced with a laugh and a swing of her hair, “left me to imagine that I lived in Israel, as I had read so much in the Old Testament as a girl, with Bethlehem right around the corner.”

However, her hometown is what I would consider a Laura Ingalls Wilder setting. The one room Christian school house, eleven miles from her house, was placed among the rolling prairies and fields. There were only three classes from kindergarten through twelfth grade, divided into K-second grade, third through sixth, and sixth through twelfth. The fifty children would sled in the winter, while in the summer a stray cow would occasionally get stuck in the barn. Behind her three-story white house at 1025 Silver Street were hills filled with cacti and pine trees.

“I would climb everywhere barefoot, although I probably shouldn’t admit that,” Naomi said grinning.

I’ve taken many Shabbos afternoon walks with Naomi, and walking beside her I can imagine a young Laura, whipping across the plains with horses behind her. I asked her for her most wild memory of South Dakota. She thought for a moment and then whipped into a story about herself, her sister Rebecca, her dog, and a herd of horses racing toward them at full speed by the call of an innocent whistle. Thankfully, the horses were trained and had only answered the whistle because of that; the kind horses then proceeded to lead the three thumping heartbeats home.

But when did Laura decide to become a Jew? Naomi straightened her back, which is already straight as a board. She has excellent posture, in a strong and almost stiff way. I imagine the thick set of rules administered at school. She said that “it wasn’t a conscious change that popped into my mind one morning over a cup of steaming coffee.” Naomi had questions about Christianity “as a subconscious memory almost as long as [she] could remember.”

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In her childhood, a reading of the Old Testament would calm her troubled spirit and give her “a peace,” while the New Testament did the opposite. With a strong pull to learn and to research the truth of religion, Naomi journeyed on a path of exploration that led her through periods of devoted religiosity and agnosticism. Finding herself completely disillusioned with both at the age of 24, Naomi committed herself to finding the religion that was “nearest and dearest to G-d’s heart.” That iron will eventually led her to find a book in the corner of a rotting shelf, with the faded title of *The Kuzari*.

And this is where the dusty old book comes in. (I find that there always is a dusty old book in each person’s past). That book “kind of ripped everything apart and put it back together again.” It was the first book that really made sense to her young pulsing mind.

Naomi followed her gut feeling, which told her to go to the east coast, where she found herself sharing an apartment with her sister in New Haven, CT. And here she was able to continue her steps toward Judaism. Naomi is now an entrepreneur, who has created a business that sells modest athletic clothing. She is a skillful writer, having published many of her own pieces. She is deep thinker. She is a seamstress. She is all of that, but I am proud to know Naomi because she is first and foremost one who had the courage to change her life.

# Everlasting

by Dini Raskin

The day I learned that I was priceless was the saddest and happiest day of Margot's life.

Tick, Tock, Tick, Tock... It's 8:00 am now, time for the old men and women with drooping faces, bulging spines, and lava-like skin to assemble in the dining room. I watch with bated breath to see if everyone has made it in this morning. Last week we lost Harry at 7:30 am. Just days earlier, Gene left us at 5:20 am, and soon.....

As I survey the dining room on this morning, everyone seems to be there, except for Margot. Margot is usually an unpleasant sight to behold, with her harsh ragged voice, unforgiving manner and egotistical attitude. A bubble of sadness rises within me, though. As much as Margot isn't one of my favorites, I will still miss seeing her grumpy countenance every day. At 12:00 pm, lunch time, she is again absent; by the time dinner rolls around, I have sadly reached the inevitable conclusion—when I suddenly see a familiar bulbous nose round the corner.

She sits down at her standard table, in her usual seat, her regular aid in tow, but she wears an unusual expression on her face. She looks forlorn. I see she is reading a letter, most uncommon for her because she so rarely receives any. I notice the subtle quiver of her hands and the quiet lines of despair that plague her aged face. As everyone files out of the dining room at 6:11 pm, Margot remains behind, alone. Being the wallflower that I am, I watch Margot: she seems to be expecting something. Her hands clutch the edge of her seat and her complexion looks even more sallow than usual. I hear footsteps as two women file into the room.

One is tall with a strong frame and the other is short with a petite frame. They both have light hair and eyes and look very much alike. Margot gestures for them to sit down, and they both look up at me and tap their feet, probably wishing I would move faster so this unpleasant moment could slip away as quickly as possible. Then they turn their reluctant faces to

Margot is looking up at them with such love that even I, myself, could not have stopped this moment: this singular moment of bliss that these three women share together.



Margot. She takes both their hands in hers; it is perhaps the most endearing motion I have ever seen from this woman.

“Ava, Samantha, have you both been well?” Margot asks, so warmly I hardly recognize her.

“As alright as we can be, for two girls whose mother is the epitome of their loathing,” the woman whose name seems to be Ava says.

Margot looks dejected, and it is now that I realize the truth. I suddenly see Margot transported to a different time: Her hair is strawberry blond, instead of white; her skin looks like elastic rubber; her fierce, blue eyes have such life, such soul. She is holding a baby while a toddler runs around at her heels.

“I asked you both here, not for forgiveness, for I know I am a hard woman with little gentility. But I am also your mother and I love you both very much.” Margot takes a deep breath. “That’s all I wanted to say.”

“Couldn’t you have told us that when we were children, aching for our mother’s love and approval?” Samantha spits out disgustedly.

“I did not know how to relate to you girls; I just assumed one day I would learn. But now the time is ticking away for me, and it will soon be too late for us to reconcile our differences.”

“You’re dying?” Samantha says slowly.

“No, girls, I have Alzheimer’s, and it is a sentence even worse than death because I don’t have time to build new memories with you girls. I want you to know the love I have for you before I slowly forget.”

There is an unearthly long pause before the two daughters face their frail mother. Slowly, they start to walk toward her. They embrace her. They walk around the room together and I can’t hear what their saying but they seem to be grateful for this one small moment together. Margot is looking up at them with such love that even I, myself, could not have stopped this moment: this singular moment of bliss that these three women share together.

At 6:40 pm, the two women walk their elderly mother back to her room. At 6:45 pm, they return.

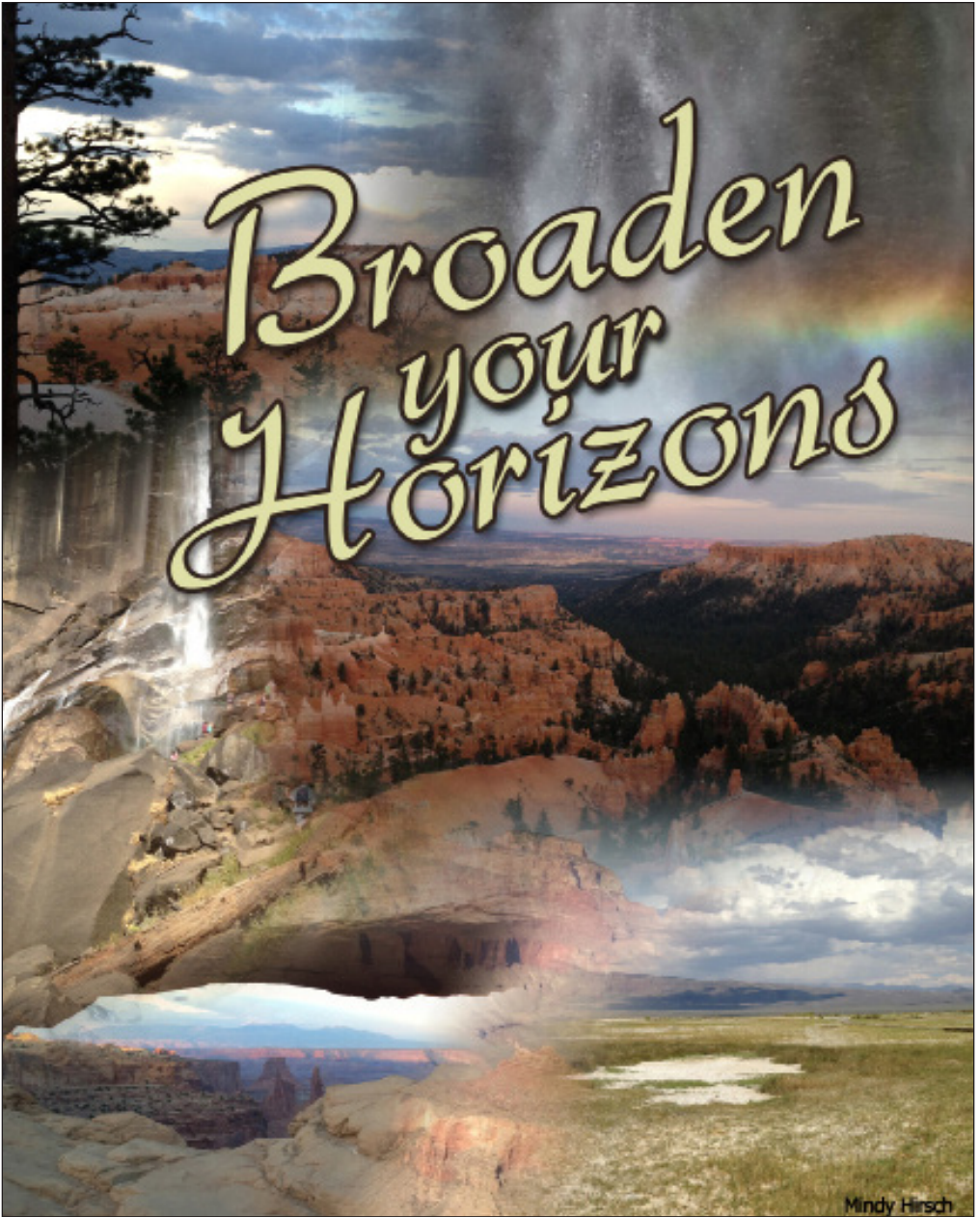
Ava points to me and remarks, “Look at the time. We really must be going.”

Samantha stares straight at me and says, “I hate time. There’s never enough of it.”

They look at each other with grim expressions and walk hand in hand out the door, leaning on each other in every sense of the word.

For a moment, I feel terrible about myself. All I am is the end...but I am also the beginning. I can’t stop—round and round and round I go. I am fleeting, I am ever-present, I am priceless. I am what makes life meaningful. I am...

Tick, Tock, Tick, Tock...



The Day I Learned  
To Broaden My Horizons

By Mindy Hirsch

# Letters to Her Brother

by Shalva Adler

The day I learned my career was over was the day it really began.

The school threw me out. They had a real pompous excuse, something about me being the best candidate for the job with this Helen Keller child – the one who’s blind and deaf. And although I know it was only a plot to get rid of me, I am no fumbling pigtailed schoolgirl; I will put my heart and soul into this child. I intend to make her speak.

I leave tomorrow.

Your sister,  
Annie

Dear Jimmy,

I told you I would make her speak. Today we stood by the well under the scorching sun, and I pumped water into her cupped hands and she spoke to me. She walked toward me with her arms stretching in front of her little body, seeing the world through her hands. Shadows tripped across her face as she neared me. When she finally found my hand I held my breath, knowing that something monumental was just out of our reach. Her hands started forming the right letters, but still I didn’t allow myself to hope. W, her hands said. A. I shut my eyes and told myself, She must be saying watch, or wall, or wood...certainly not—

T...E... R.

Water, I said back, nearly shaking.

Water, she agreed.

I may have failed to teach you how to stand on your own two feet, Jimmy, and I will never forget you crying for me in your last few minutes, as those horrid orphanage ladies dragged me away because you were dying and they knew nothing about the bond of family. But I succeeded with her.

Your sister,  
Annie

I will be  
comforted by the  
presence of my  
Helen, who lives  
in darkness also.

Dear Jimmy,

Perhaps I am a sentimental old lady with a too-high opinion of herself, but I did feel today as though I had done one or two things right. I missed you, of course, as I do most every day. But when I raised my head after falling asleep over a book I was trying to read, I could make out the shape of Helen, sitting quietly in the armchair where she likes to knit. She was looking straight ahead, her hands moving fast in her lap, those needles clicking together fit to give me a fine headache. And suddenly I saw her as she was at six years old – my eyes are always playing tricks on me, Jimmy – with little brown curls falling into her face and the same straight-ahead stare that told you straightaway she was blind. I blinked and right away I could see her again as the woman I’ve watched her become, but it got me thinking...

The girl I saw in the armchair for just a moment – the girl who had so much to say but no way to say it and anger fit for a wild lion just building up inside of her – that was the girl she could have remained. But Jimmy, I changed that, didn’t I? I became “Teacher” and spoke to her through my hands. I still remember the frustration of those early days, of second-guessing myself and asking the clear-as-day question: “Can I really make a deaf and blind girl learn?” Sometimes it doesn’t feel real what she’s become— what we’ve become, together. Oh, I’ve gone and made myself cry now.

I fear this will be the last letter I can write you; my eyes seem to grow dimmer with each passing day, and although I tell myself otherwise, I know that too soon, maybe in a few short dawns, I will once again retreat into darkness. Don’t worry about me then, Jimmy-boy. I will be comforted by the presence of my Helen, who lives in darkness also.

When I was younger I thought I would live forever. How I’ve changed over the years, Jimmy. I’ve softened around the edges, and I can’t figure out if it’s for better or worse. But sooner than we both think, Jimmy-boy, we’ll all be together again: you and me and Momma and Poppa, a family again.

Your sister,  
Annie

THE DAYI

# 5

Section

**Fear**

LEARNED

# Fear

by Shayna Strum, Editor

Franklin D. Roosevelt said “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

Rachel Klamen, portrays fear in her story “Dark Rainbow,” which depicts the very real fear of a child who has lost her mother. Rachel writes: “My hands started to get wet with sweat, and my knees began to buckle.” I am sure many of us can relate to this story—terrified at the thought of losing one of our parents. Another story that I am sure most of can at least partially identify with is “On Line” by Hannah Balasiano. Through the dual perspectives of a teenage girl and her grandmother, Hannah addresses our society’s online Internet obsession and uses clever wordplay to show what real fear is.

Atara Huberfeld also uses a play on words in her story “The Number Game.” This story, as told through the voice of a fictional teenager who suffers from severe anorexia, genuinely pulled at my heart strings. Atara created a voice that wasn’t angry or sad, but simply controlled. This piece provides a fascinating look into the way someone with an eating disorder might think.

Gabriella Englander is successful at disseminating important information throughout “To Pay in Full,” a Faustian tale written in beautiful language. The finale is a wonder in itself that reveals the fear of a heartless man finally getting the ending he deserves. Rivky Kreiser also does an admirable job of peppering her piece with important details from the year 1960 in “Ich Bin Bit Kein Berliner.” Her piece recalls the very real fear and rage a former Berliner hears upon hearing President Kennedy’s famous speech on the radio.

Finally, Michal Cohen breathes real fear into “Breathe,” a short and poetic piece that takes us on a journey that will haunt us long after we have finished reading it. “No matter the color, all their eyes are black,” Michal writes. I am impressed by how she creates fear through the use of color. Eyes are known as the windows to the soul—and yet all that is in ‘their’ eyes is darkness, emptiness.

Each of these stories demonstrates a very real kind of fear that the character experiences and must overcome—whether it is fear derived from within or without. These writers challenge us as readers to consider what we think we know about fear and all the forms (both sinister and innocent-seeming) in which it can exist.





# The Day I Learned I Was Homeless

By Hendel Seif

129

# Breathe

by Michal Cohen

The day I learned: Just because you breathe doesn't mean you have a heart. For a breath is a fleeting moment. An opportunity. A decision. A disappointment. You see the heart is just a tool, an object that enables you to breathe, breathe the moment – to use it for its worth.

Black.

No matter the color, all their eyes are black. Staring. Staring, but not at the beauty of our faces or the shape of our figures, but at the frail and thin material that our skin has become. Material for their lampshades. And we're all walking as if on a tight rope, walking on our tiptoes trying to balance. Left. Right. Left. Right. And the middle one in the row always snaps. Always.

And those eyes!

Oh, those black glossy eyes that follow! They whisper, "Come closer – if you work, you will live." And so we keep moving. Back and forth. Back and forth. We stretch out our arms, but never look right and never look left and especially never look down.

Only they're  
playing with a  
life, the life of my  
mother.

And the middle one always snaps.

In just one moment. Just one breath – the middle one's gone. But the middle is so far away, so many moments away. And there are people behind me falling. I feel them falling. Falling into the barbed wires. Falling from grief, falling into lost hope, falling in a moment. A fleeting moment.

A breath.

And they shake the tightrope, again and again, as if playing rattle-snake. Only they're playing with a life, the life of my mother. My mother who was in the middle. My mother who snapped in the middle of the tightrope. And the people on the other side, they have so many moments, yet hearts that cannot breathe. Their oxygen stops where their cruelty begins. And here I am, in the middle of the tightrope, waiting to snap.

When in the last moment I breathe, I breathe because I look at the people on the other side, waving and laughing and rattling and staring with dark eyes. I breathe because it's the one thing they'll never be able to do.

Because they'll never have a heart.



The Day I Learned  
To Draw Not What I See, But  
What I Know It Can Become

By Atara Samuels

# Ich Bin Nit Kein Berliner (1963)

by Rivky Kreiser

The day I learned that President Kennedy would be speaking in my hometown of Berlin, I realized that I would have to turn around and stare directly into the past. Why was the leader of the strongest country in the world returning to a city of ashes? What was the point? What could he possibly do to make me feel safe ever again?

In two minutes Kennedy will speak in Berlin, the place I hate with such a passion. I wait to see what he will say to the people. The people who changed the world I grew up in. The people with ice blue eyes who blamed me for their suffering. What can he begin to say to the upstairs neighbors who stopped giving me candy and told their children to avoid me? What can he say to those murderers?

Then I didn't know of real problems that couldn't possibly be fixed. I knew about the leaves changing colors in the park and when I would receive my birthday present. Yes, I painted myself a perfect childhood. Yes, I left out all the realities that bothered me when I was a child. But I left the imperfections out because I don't remember them.

The brain is a funny thing. After time only the outline of certain impressionable memories remain. A child will remember the day her bike was stolen or when she broke her hand. I know these things happened to me, yet I can't seem to recall anything about them. Those Berliners didn't just take away my home or my childhood or my family. They stole my memory and my soul. They left me bitter and cold. They left me all alone, abandoned.

And so I made it here to America to be stared at, like I'm some kind of experiment. Me, with my funny English and funny ways, can't seem to be accepted by the people. How can they trust me, an immigrant to do any job when they can't understand a word I say? It makes perfect sense, right? And so I sit here in my chair thinking like I am right now.

At first I thought that I wanted to have nothing to do with people like me; my future was completely American, right? But no, I will never be American, and so I seek out people who speak my own language. We sit and talk. We don't reminisce—because why should we cry? We live, we are free. We are thousands of miles away from barbed wire.

The people here in America seem to think that as long as you believe in something or someone, you can survive. They say that they also suffered

because they sent their sons to war and are now moving on. They say it as if they went through the same thing I did. What do they know? Nothing. I can't move on.

Suddenly, everybody in the room has gone silent. We crowd about the radio. This is the moment when the American nation's hero will speak. We are about to listen to a speech that has been long awaited, even by me. Even though I know nothing about the government, I am consciously aware that I am about to listen to something that will one day go into history books.

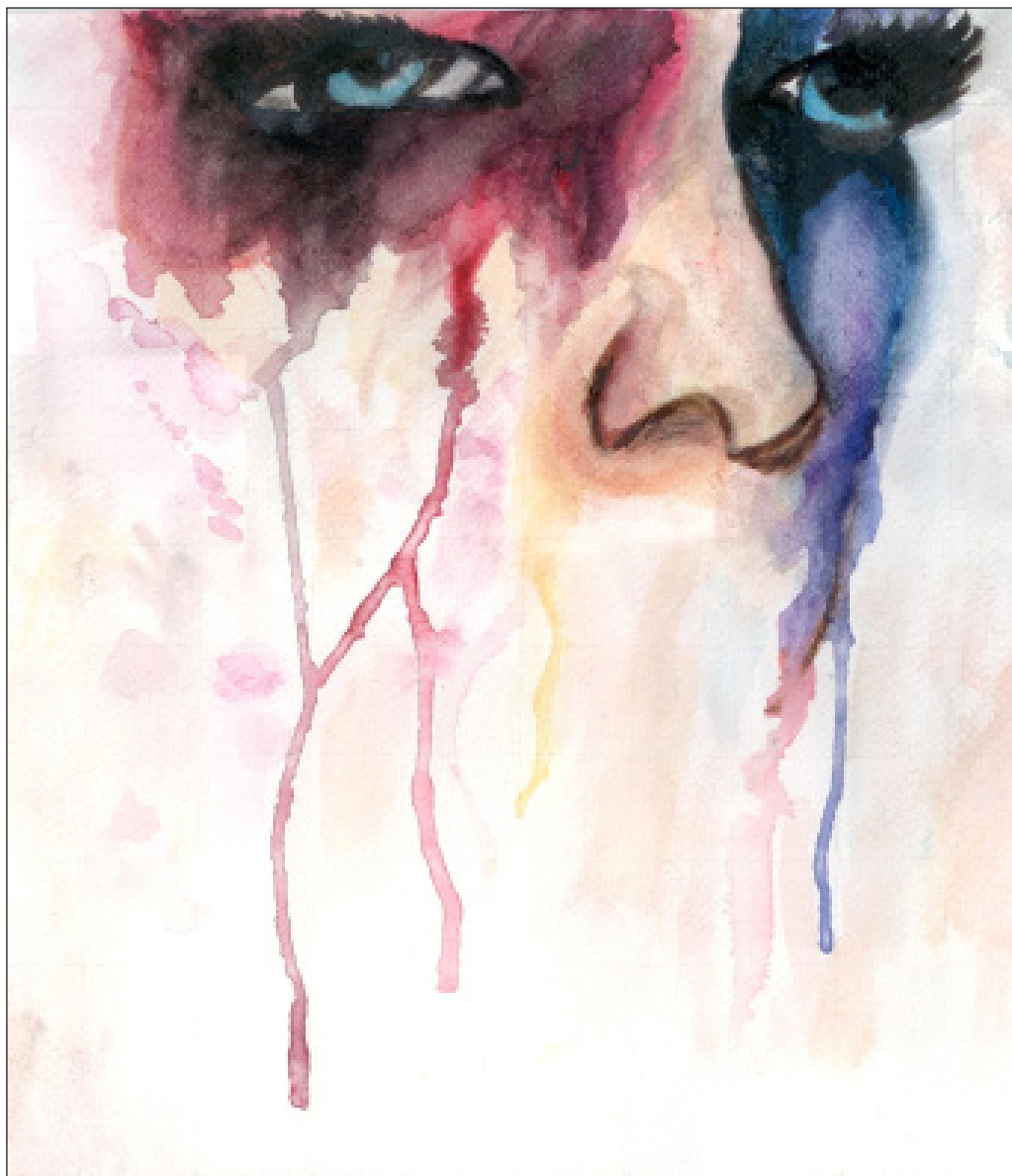
There is one last shush and suddenly I hear a voice begin. It is a young American voice filled with that hopeful American charm. It soars through the room as if it has wings and can fly anywhere, to anyone.

**In two minutes  
Kennedy will  
speak in Berlin,  
the place I hate  
with such a  
passion.**

I hear him say: "Today, in the world of freedom, the proudest boast is Ich bin ein Berliner!" I am paralyzed and I continue to listen to that voice that continues to fly across the oceans. "Let them come to Berlin," he keeps on repeating it as if to invite the whole world to come visit Berlin, the best place on Earth. He seems to say that Berlin is a place where freedom runs free.

Suddenly I am filled with rage. The rage that I succumb to is so ugly and so raw and so real. No one should go to Berlin. It is a city of murderers where no redemption will ever be known. How can he say this? How can people believe him or cheer for him? How can the people of Berlin not still be so ashamed? How can they smile or look in the mirror each morning?

The radio is off now and he hasn't even finished. I stare at the people surrounding me, and suddenly I scream: "Ich bin nit kein Berliner!" Let the whole world know that I am no Berliner.



# The Day I Learned

**I Can**

By Leah Berger

# Dark Rainbow

by Rachel Klamen

The day I learned not to let go of my mother's hand, I was holding my favorite teddy bear.

All of a sudden, my hands started to get wet with sweat, and my knees began to buckle. My heart was pounding like when I run, but this time I was standing in the same place and didn't know which way to go. I looked up and saw people. So many people. There were people in cars, people walking, people on bikes, people on their phones, people everywhere. I felt the tears clogged in my eyes, ready to come out, but I was not ready for them. I wanted to be a big girl. I wanted to make Mommy proud.

I clutched my soft Teddy, but even my beloved teddy bear that I never let out of my sight could not make me feel better. I tried to reach up, but all I could feel was air. I looked around and saw all the billboards with pictures

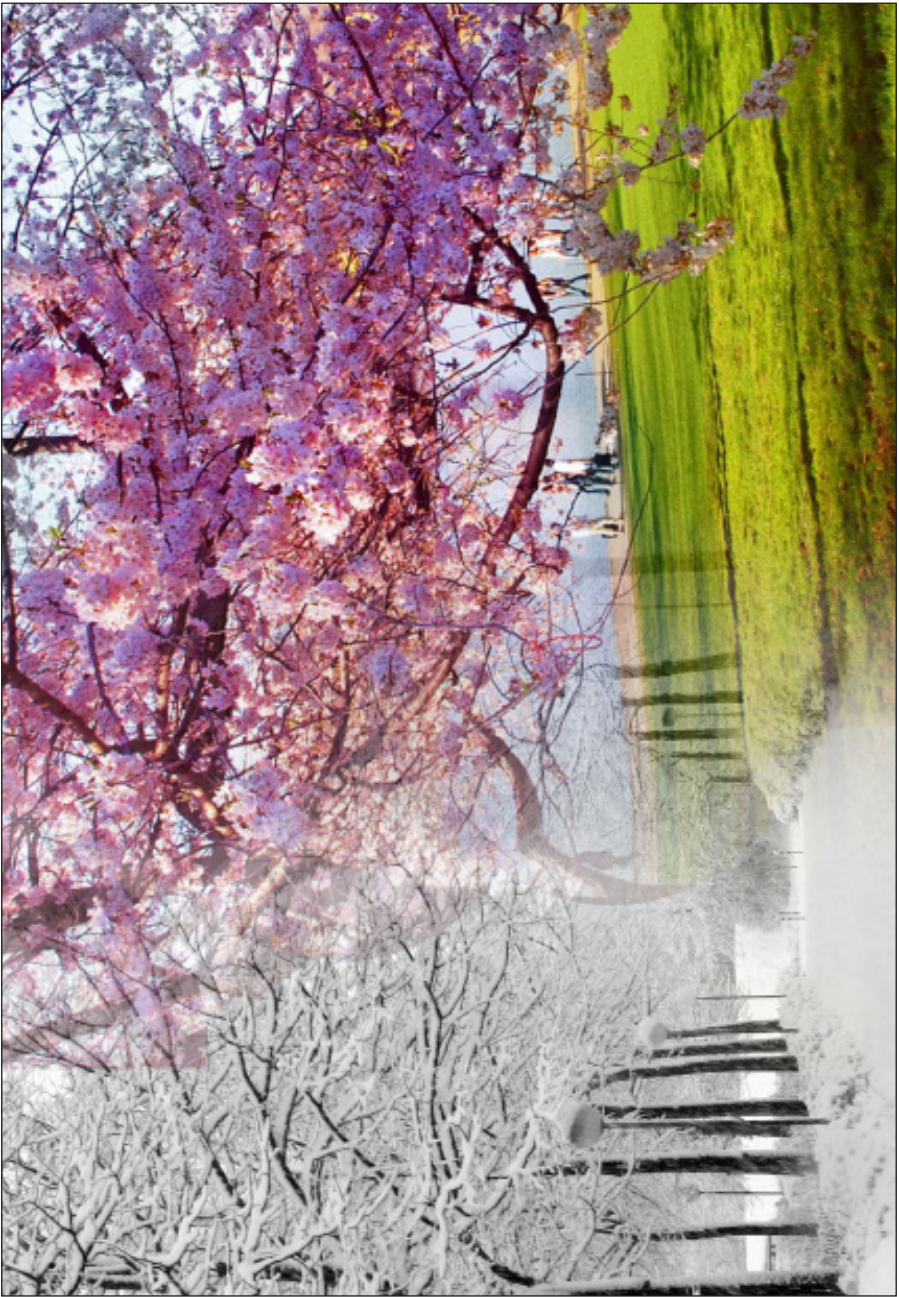
I clutched my soft  
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me feel better.

on them. Usually they would put a smile on my face, but not that day because I couldn't choose my favorite with Mommy. This time, when I looked up to the big, tall, buildings, I just saw flashing signs. There were colors, all the colors of the rainbow, but they didn't look bright and pretty like a rainbow was, they were dark and jumping out at me. All I saw were lights and pictures all around me. My head began to spin and I started to feel dizzy.

A girl with the same braids and black buckle shoes as me walked by and smiled at me. I looked to her right and saw she was holding someone's hand. Her mother's. I wanted to be that happy girl. I wanted Mommy to be walking by my side, holding my hand, leading me through this place. Why did she get that hand? Why did she deserve it more than I did? The wind blew me down on to an old wooden bench, and I did not have the strength to push back. I was weak, I was alone. I could not hold back anymore.

As I sat there, I watched as the tears pouring down my cheeks dropped on to my favorite dress, my lucky dress, that was nothing but unlucky to me today. Why did I let go of Mommy's hand? Was my teddy bear really more important? Were two hands for Teddy more important than any for my loving mother? I threw my dear Teddy onto the ground and kicked it away.

Then I saw a familiar hand quickly pick Teddy right back up, wipe him off and put him back in my hand. That same hand wiped away my tears and then slipped into mine.



# The Day I Learned To Overcome Adversity

By Leah Garrin

136



# The Number Game

by Atara Huberfeld

“The day I learned to stop.” Ha! She thought as she walked home from school. That wasn’t very likely. Why would she?

She thought back to the beginning, when she had kept telling herself it was only temporary. It was just to get ready for this spring break. Then it was just until she reached 110. 110 was normal, right?

“It’s just another 2 weeks,” she had told herself, “then I’ll stop. Just a few more weeks.”

And then a few more. And a few more. How long had it been now? 8 months? 8 months sounded accurate. When she thought of its pitiful size, she nearly cringed. She’d heard of people who’d lasted years. And here she was, pretending 8 months was actually substantial. If it were a survival of the toughest, she’d be left in a pile of pathetic dust.

She squeezed through the late-afternoon crowds, turning the corner to find her apartment building looming before her. She thought quickly: Today was...Tuesday. Kelly would be at gymnastics, Brian had basketball, and little Joey had little league in the park. Thank G-d, the apartment would be empty. That made life easier.

She stopped off at the front desk to pick up the mail. Bill, college advertisement, Vogue! She unwrapped the magazine, flipping through the embossed pages as the illuminated numbers of the elevator ticked off above her, the metal box rising slowly. 10, 11, DING! She stepped out into the hallway, finding her door and punching in the code. She closed the door silently behind her and leaned back against it. Blessed, blessed silence.

Dropping her books in her room, she wandered into the kitchen, stomach growling slightly. She consulted the clock on the wall. Joey and Kelly would be home in 25 minutes, and Brian 10 minutes after that. Perfect—she had just enough time to make dinner.

She dropped the mail on the counter before grabbing a pot from one of the numerous cabinets and filling it with water. She picked up the magazine again as the water heated behind her, bubbles popping softly.

**Food meant a lot. But being skinny—being skinny was far more important.**

“Find your perfect long sweater!” Page 1 announced.

“Our celebrity fashion faves!” Page 52 crowed.

Page after page of fashion tips, trends, and, of course, the ads. Page after page of paper thin models wearing this season’s newest clothes, posing for the unseen cameras. And they all looked beautiful.

She’d heard what everyone always said. “They’re wearing tons of makeup.” “All the pictures are photo-shopped.” “No one actually looks like that.” But she knew that wasn’t true. She’d met the models in real life. She’d seen just how tiny their waists were, how thin their faces were. She knew these people existed, and if they were real, then maybe, one day, she could be one of them.

The pot came to a boil and she added the 78 tri-colored noodles. 6 minutes later, she drained the water, replacing it with shredded cheese, butter and a bit too much milk.

The kitchen filled with the smell of melted cheesy goodness as she scooped out 4 separate portions onto paper plates, leaving all but one on the counter for her 3 siblings who would be home in...7 minutes. She held onto the last plate, grabbing a disposable fork and napkin before leaving the apartment.

She walked quickly once she left the building, scouring the sidewalk as she went. She didn’t have to walk very far until she found what she was looking for.

She knelt down, trying to make herself small as to not block the city foot traffic but receiving a few dirty looks from passing pedestrians regardless. She ignored them, handing the hot meal to the man with the cardboard sign, who sat underneath the semi-protection of the towering, black slate office building.

“Maybe you should settle in early.” She urged him as he accepted the food with a look of grateful astonishment. “I think it may rain tonight.”

She got up and smiled as she heard the man blessing her receding back. She would never understand why people didn’t do good more often. If everyone gave a little food away, maybe the world wouldn’t be such a mess.

Back in the apartment, she returned to the fridge, removing the cluster of grapes she’d noticed earlier. There were 28 in total, and they were big. She’d be eating a lot tonight.

She plucked off 5, washing them carefully before settling down at the island to eat. She ate slowly, carefully, savoring every bite. People these days didn’t appreciate food anymore, but she’d learned to in the past 8 months. Food meant a lot. But being skinny—being skinny was far more important.

# On Line

by Hannah Balasiano

The day I learned I might die, I was online.

YES! J. Crew is having an awesome sale online! I really want to order that cute navy blazer with brown suede patches on the elbows—wait, MY COMPUTER JUST CRASHED!!! What am I going to do? If that isn't bad enough, no emails or communication with my friends, and...oh no, did I remember to save my draft of the essay I wrote for the MHS Literary Journal?!? I stayed up all night to get it perfect and now it could be gone... HELP!!! This day is not going well for me.

My grandmother, who was sitting in the living room heard my tantrum, and softly asked, "Honey, what's all the commotion in there? Is everything okay?"

"NO!!!" I yelled as my face turned tomato red. "I'm DYING...I can't go online... my computer crashed...and there was a sale...J. Crew...this blazer...and I lost my Literary Journal...and I can't—"

"Honey, I don't know how I can help you with your Crew Jay, or your diary entry for school...but dying? On line, you say? Well, that I can."

\*\*\*

The day I learned I might die, I was on line, too.

I was standing on line. The air was frigid cold and my breath was smoke; my toes were turning purple and about to bleed. My stomach was turning up and down, and my mind was in a whirlwind, too: Will I be sent to the right or to the left? Will I live or will I die?

The sound of babies and mothers screaming from separation pierced my ears. I froze as the man in the shiny black boots approached me. He left me after a moment and went to my friend. We all looked the same, though, with the yellow star pasted to our shirts. That was the only color we had left on us. My mind raced and raced: How would I escape? Would I ever see my family again? Will I live or will I die?

It was almost my turn. I watched Dr. Mengele determine life or death with the flick of his leather glove. Step by step I walked toward him, each

Step by step I  
walked toward  
him, each step a  
question.



step a question. Life or death? Life or death? I walked slowly with buckling knees, sweaty palms, and a pounding heart that almost leapt out of my body. And suddenly, there I was in front of him.

He raised his finger and pointed to the right. And I lived.

\*\*\*

My mouth dropped open, my jaw almost touching the floor, as I listened to my grandmother's past. Her eyes were a storybook, and her tears depicted so much pain and suffering. We sat together side by side and cried as she recalled those times.

Those times were times of death. NOT of dead computers.

# To Pay in Full

by Gabriella Englander

The day I learned the meaning of “to pay in full,” as defined by my master’s visitor, was the last day I was employed as the butler. And from his definition, I now suspect the identity of the visitor...

But enough of my discourse—let the visitor relay the account.

\*\*\*

Gateshead was a trench of raw gray fog that wetted one’s face in gauzy sprays; the streets were rimmed with blurred lamp lights and an ostensibly permanent coating of mud. It was about half past twelve as I loomed before the white manor’s princely veranda and rapped a good three times on the massive door. Some gentleman bid me in, perhaps the butler; from what I could recall of the manor’s current master, he seemed quite able to afford one.

I was chauffeured into a wood-paneled parlor that featured two gilded Venetian armchairs propped in front of a seething fire. One chair was occupied and its occupant beckoned me to stand in front of him; I obeyed despite the inconsistency this posed to my nature. A window had been opened to let the smoke out and was consequently letting fog in instead. I noticed then an opened silver cigarette case resting casually on an antique table by his side; he arched his eyebrows when he recognized me.

“Ah. So it is you, the very devil. I remember you. Why, I could scarcely believe Old Ganders when he reported your arrival.” He inclined his head to the butler who stiffened by the door and reached for a cigar with trembling hands. “How, ah, peculiar it is that you seek me out, especially at this hour—”

At this point we were face to face and I cut him short. “Mr. Withers, you may very well be surprised at my coming here at this hour; no matter. You are one of my most frequent customers: only a fortnight ago I called to collect payment for the fate you dealt to that Mansfield girl, you do remember?”

Mr. Withers leaned back in his chair, suddenly smug, without a flicker of remorse on his face. “Of course I do.”

“I take it you miss your mother?”

“No. That woman drove me to my wits’ end. I am glad to be rid of such a creature.”

“I see. Nevertheless, this time, I warn you,” I leaned down toward the clean-shaven face. “Propriety compels me to visit. And as such, I will take graver measures as my due.”

Mr. Withers did not light his cigar; he motioned the butler to leave us and paused before fixing one pointed blue eye on me. “Oh? Propriety, is it now? Amuse me. Have I displayed behavior for which society shuns me? They never have ostracized me in response to my previous...ah, indulgences.”

“Well, you broke our little contract, albeit unknowingly: someone else was there this time. Hence, they saw you in your...indulgence, as you put it so pleasantly. You know the rule: no other human can bear witness.”

He bid me no response. I took that as an invitation to proceed.

“And, as for society, indeed they will shun you; that is, the society you are about to meet, for the fates you so kindly dealt them in order to save yourself.” I cleared my throat as he hardly seemed to grasp my meaning. “I am well aware of your recent actions, Mr. Withers.” I paused, but the man did not dislodge his hand from where it gripped the antique table. “Yes, you know the one, and quite frankly, it requires penance, the likes of which you have never undertaken before—in my humble opinion.”

“In your opinion?”

Ah, then he hadn’t lost his tongue. “You know who I am.”

“Who wouldn’t?” he whispered.

“Well then, let’s get down to business, shall we?” I drew a crumpled paper from my trench coat and relayed the facts of consequence. “Ah, yes, it was a Sunday night – do correct me if I’m wrong – at a quarter to eight precisely, a man by the name of Eduard Montebull. Does that ring a bell? I believe you skewered this unfortunate man with a... picket?” I looked Mr. Withers in the eye. “Over a woman, I daresay?”

An ugly scowl shot from those steel blue eyes. “You wouldn’t understand.”

And I could  
have sworn that  
for a moment, a  
single moment, I  
caught a fleeting  
cry suspended in  
those blue eyes...



“Perhaps.” I skimmed further down the paper “Oh, would you look at that—I was right: it was a woman. Pitiful. Wait, what have we here? She was an heiress to a rather large estate. Ah, that explains your avid interest in her.” I crumpled the paper and slipped it into my trench coat. “I have presented the case. Your verdict is quite clear: you owe another debt. And I expect payment – this time in full – as someone did witness the murder of our dear, dear friend Mr. Montebull.”

Mr. Withers sprang from his chair in a sudden fury, knocking over the antique table and scattering the cigars across the Persian rug. The silver cigarette case landed with a deafening thud. “Another debt! By Jove, I am through with your debts, the devil take me. I have paid you enough. Look around—do you see anyone, anyone here? No, I am the last one; you have taken them all, save my butler, and you expect me to pay one more?” His voice dropped to a somber whisper. “Besides, how can I? There is no one left to take my place... this time.” He paused. “Even, even that woman is gone.”

I smoothed the cuffs of my coat. “You are quite right, although, all my endeavors were a token of our contract. But it is of no consequence, as you are forgetting one crucial fact: I said in full.”

He recoiled. “What do you, what do you mean?”

I proceeded to roll up my sleeves.

His eyes widened and he stumbled back into the armchair as I took a step towards him.

“No. You can’t mean—no. No, no, please, I—”

“Hush.”

\*\*\*

I sensed a presence by my shoulder. “Who’s there?”

The foyer was mockingly empty. I turned back to watch the scene through the peephole, but the parlor had fallen silent. Straining my eyes, I could barely discern the back of my master’s armchair. A hand hung limply over the armrest and the visitor was nowhere to be seen.

I entered the room to question my master about the visitor’s identity, but his head had sunken into the dip of his shoulder, eyes open though unseeing. And I could have sworn that for a moment, a single moment, I caught a fleeting cry suspended in those blue eyes; suddenly, a curtain swept across the clean shaven face, solidifying the features into the mere echo of a man.

THE DAYI



# 6

Section

**I Was No Longer a Child**

LEARNED

# I Was No Longer a Child

by Shira Hein, Editor

“Growing up is losing some illusions, in order to acquire others,” Virginia Woolf once said. Everyone has to grow up, and all childhoods have to end—how soon and how fast this happens, however, can make a huge impact on a person’s life. This section of the Literary Journal is about the experiences that people go through to mark this transition.

In “The Firing of Ms. Wilson,” Tirzah Lehrfield approaches the subject matter rather lightly, with a bit of humor. In her story about a girl who thinks that her teacher who was fired from work was literally set on fire(!), she portrays the innocence of youth. In “Leaving Johnny Behind,” Adina Feder takes a harsher approach, dealing with the death of a brother, an Army soldier, whose passing marks the end of his younger sister’s youth.

In “The Day I Learned What the Color Orange Was,” a work of nonfiction, Chaviva Hoffnung expresses how she had to make this transition (from younger to wiser) in her own life: when she heard a woman’s firsthand account of the eviction of the entire Gaza Strip. Avigayil Karasick shows the transition from childhood to adulthood through “Time to Grow Up,” a fictional piece about a young woman who is starting out in her career. Her character is delayed on the train when a teenager jumps onto the tracks. Avigayil paints a picture of a cozy childhood juxtaposed with the harsh realities of adulthood.

In a grim and sobering fashion, Devorah Pinczower writes about a girl living during the Holocaust who learns that she can no longer ride her bike, simple because she is a Jew. Her piece, “Stolen Youth,” grips the readers with the innocence of a child encountering the cruel realities of this time period. Tamar Skydell also writes about the Holocaust in her work, “Yellow,” grimly recounting the day the Nazis ripped everything away from a child, leaving her with nothing but confusion. Tamar uses the motif of “yellow” to bind the elements of her story together and shock her reader with simple yet striking conclusion.

Chayala Friedman takes a different approach and writes about the day a man realizes he is old and the many promises he has broken over the years. Her piece, “When the Old Set In,” grippingly shows how unfulfilling life can be if you don’t live it to the maximum.

Each one of the writers in this section takes a unique and beautiful approach to the end of childhood and the start of a new journey toward adulthood. “Growing up” can mean so many things – and happen to people both young and old – and the pieces in this section capture the wide variety of ways one can graduate from the school of youth.



# The Day I Learned To Raise My Hand

By Yaffa Jacobson

# The Firing of Ms. Wilson

by Tirza Lehrfield

The day I learned that things aren't always as they sound was the day my least favorite first-grade teacher didn't show up to school.

"Where's Ms. Wilson?" I asked my friend Sarah as I hung up my jacket that cool November morning, grateful for my teacher's absence.

"Oh, my mom told me that the school fired her."

"They fired her?!"

My mouth opened in shock as horrible images of dancing flames and charred ashes and smoldering teachers burned in my mind. Ms. Wilson, who just yelled at me yesterday for not collecting any red and orange and yellow colored leaves for our autumn leaf collage, had been incinerated?

"What did she do?!"

"Oh, you know... She couldn't really control us."

Indeed she couldn't, but to fire her?! I walked away from Sarah in shock and sat down in my seat, deep in thought. I actually spent half an hour with my dad last night collecting leaves from the park. I even got a few acorns. But Ms. Wilson won't be here today or tomorrow or the next day to commend me for my efforts. I'll never see her again. She was fired. Fired!

I looked around the classroom. Everyone was so calm. Maybe people didn't yet know. Only me and Sarah. Well, it was my duty to notify my uninformed classmates about the unfortunate news. I poked Rachel.

"You heard about Ms. Wilson?" I asked, making my anxiety and worry apparent on my face and in my voice.

"Oh, yeah," nodded Rachel with a knowing shrug and an unwarranted lack of concern. "Too bad, I guess. She wasn't that nice, was she?"

What are we – barbarians?! She wasn't that bad! But Rachel plowed on.

My mouth opened  
in shock as  
horrible images  
of dancing flames  
and charred ashes  
and smoldering  
teachers burned  
in my mind.



“Remember that time she made Abby stand out in the hall just because she was whispering in class...? She was just plain mean, you know?”

Oh, come on! Abby wasn't whispering, she was shouting! It was annoying to me, even! Ms. Wilson was certainly justified! To fire her because of that?!?

I don't know how I made it through the rest of the day. Every time I saw my principal or any other teacher, I wondered whether they had played a part in Ms. Wilson's firing. I thought about Ms. Wilson and remembered her funny accent. Oh yeah, she had just moved here from – I tried to recall what my principal had told our class in September – Poland, I think it was. So she and her family were immigrants. Immigrants. I would get a point for using a vocabulary word, except Ms. Wilson was no longer available to give vocab points. I wondered what Ms. Wilson's family thought about America now that they knew how we treated unsatisfactory teachers. Maybe they'll move back to Poland. I heard Poland was cold. I hope they don't freeze. At least they won't be fired in their country. I wasn't sure whether I'd rather freeze or burn....

For a full fifteen minutes that night, I cried to my confused mother about our cruel school and our inhumane forms of punishment and about how terrible I felt for not collecting those autumn leaves when I should have. She cleared up my misunderstanding and laughed at me while I sheepishly dried my eyes, but at least I was prepared the next day and didn't jump to conclusions when our principal told the class that our new teacher wouldn't come in today because she was feeling under the weather. Although exactly what storm she was stuck in, I wasn't sure, since that day happened to be a sunny 50°.

I don't know, it's a confusing world out there.

# Stolen Youth

by Devorah Pinczower

The day I learned that my childhood was being robbed from me was the day my school's boiler broke.

It was during WWII, but before the Germans invaded Hungary. I was skipping down the cobblestone roads dreaming about the aroma of the soft, warm cookies which I was about to be rewarded with because of my good report card grades. As I was holding my mother's arm, I passed a big, tall building that anyone would simply overlook, but at which I stopped to stare. There, on the side of the building, were large, scribbled letters. I slowly, slowly made out one word after another. I imagined my mother's pride and joy when she would see that I could read. As I finally completed the last syllable, I looked up at my mother to see her rosy cheeks suddenly turn pale. Only later did I find out that the first thing I had ever read was anti-Semitic graffiti.

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A few months after this incident, and after the memory of my reading disaster was long forgotten, I received my first bike. I was finally like the older kids on my block! Every night, after school, I ran to the back of our apartment and practiced learning how to ride, so one day I would be able to ride with ease. Making more progress each night, I was finally ready to try riding in public for the first time. As I sat in class tapping my pencil and staring at the second hand on the clock, I saw myself riding my new shiny bike. I saw the red bell, the black new wheels, and the strings hanging from its side that I loved to twirl around my finger as I rode. Finally, when the last class was over, I ran home and searched, but to no avail: my bike was missing! Heart pounding, I ran to my mother and before I had a chance to even ask her, she said to me in a grave tone, "Sorry, but they took your bike away this morning; Jews can no longer own bikes."

That night, I could not eat dinner or concentrate on anything. The only thought that went through my mind was: how can someone be mean enough to steal my bike?

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Sorry, but  
they took your  
bike away this  
morning; Jews  
can no longer own  
bikes.

A few weeks later, my question was answered. I was in school when suddenly the principal walked in and announced that all students should return home because the school boiler had broken down. Applause and cheering erupted from the classroom as everyone grabbed their bags and raced out the door. Chatting with my friends on the way home, I suddenly stopped short. In the distance, I saw uniformed men moving benches out of my shul. I ran home, each step heavier than the next. As I stepped over the threshold, I listened quietly from behind the door and heard bits and pieces of sad, distressed tones and fragments of sentences. I caught the words “Germans” and “danger.” These words would be imbedded in my mind forever, and although I did not understand how much my future was about to change, I knew that my life would never be the same.



# The Day I Learned I Learned With My Dad

By Avigayil Rosensweig



# The Day I Learned What the Color Orange Was

by Chaviva Hoffnung

The day I learned what the color orange was, I was sixteen years old.

I trudged slowly through the hallways of the lev Yerushalayim hotel, making my way toward the lecture room. I hit the button for the lobby and stood back to gaze at my image in the elevator mirror. I'll admit, I looked a little messy in my baggy sweatshirt and jersey skirt, but I pardoned myself by saying that it was tisha b'av, after all, and I hadn't eaten in twelve hours and counting.

Ding! I reached my floor, walked in the room and was hit by orange. I sat down on a chair in the middle of a semi-circle of four girls, and we waited anxiously for Meiraz, the camp madricha, to begin her story. I woke up early for this, to hear her part in the story of Gush Katif.

Gush Katif was a cluster of Israeli settlements on the Gaza strip of Israel; each town stood as a symbol of perseverance, surrounded by hostile Arab villages. Tragically, Gush Katif is no more. In August of 2005, the settlements were evicted, the people forced out, and their homes destroyed. Meiraz was doing shirut leumi, community service, down in the village of Morag, one of the seventeen settlements.

The people of Gush Katif made a human chain across the settlements in protest of the government...

Meiraz proceeded to tell us about her life in the Gush during its last year of existence. She lifted her picture album; the paper crinkled as she turned page after page of happy Israeli children, their smiles contagious.

She had only taken pictures of the good times in Morag, and then her camera broke. She flipped to a picture of her sitting around a table with a group of teenagers. Meiraz ran a program every week to engage the teens and give them a safe place to relax from the worry of everyday life in Gush Katif. There were times when she and her group narrowly missed shells that exploded only a few feet from the building they were in.

Meiraz had us finger the “propaganda” (so to speak) of Gush Katif. Laid out on a table in front of us were t-shirts, flags and bumper stickers—

all of them orange, blaring the slogan “ha’am im Gush Katif,” the nation is with Gush Katif. All around the world Jews prayed for their fellow brothers in Gaza. I recalled my neighbor flying that symbolic orange flag from a window for all to see. Now it was more than simply orange: it was our nation.

Meiraz recalled how the people in her settlement did not really believe that the government would evict them. Most people did not pack their homes, even after warnings. Even toward the bitter end they bound together in hope: the people of Gush Katif made a human chain across the settlements in protest of the government, to show that no one would ever break the chain of Gush Katif. Yet to no avail.

By August, 22, 2005, the Gaza strip was completely evicted—all Israelis gone. People screamed out in prayer to G-d as the soldiers arrived, tasked with forcibly dragging people out. And as soon as the homes were ripped of their inhabitants, they were spray painted with an “x” and marked for destruction.

I sat there stunned by her recitation. I had never heard about the disengagement firsthand, but she had been there, and her accounts were nightmarishly real. And so although I was sixteen at the time, that was the first day I truly learned the meaning of the color orange.



# The Day I Learned To Appreciate Solitude

By Sharony Polinsky

155

# Time to Be a Grown Up

by Avigayil Karasick

The day I learned what it means to be a big girl was the day I woke up to the screech of my 6 AM alarm. It rang and rang until I finally was able to detach myself from the fluffiness of my pristine, white blanket and soft, downy pillow. I walk to the bathroom with one eye still stuck closed. No more toothpaste. Great. This day is off to a great start. I take a deep breath. This is real life. This is what it means to wake up early for work. This is what it means to be a big girl.

I have just landed a new job at The New York Times Magazine. Sounds impressive, no? I thought so too when I went for an interview. After majoring in English literature at Hunter College and then attending Columbia University School of Journalism, earning a dual degree in journalism and computer science, I was given the rewarding and prestigious job of assistant—a secretary’s assistant, to be exact. I am sure how I was lucky enough to land such a job, especially since I did not major in (or, for that matter, take any courses in) coffee making 101, the Keurig technique. This “well paying” job is supposed to give me experience and prepare me for a promotion. Exactly how and in what you may ask? I am still unclear about that. I just try to keep reminding myself that this is a job that will first and foremost pay the rent and then, dressed up, look more impressive on a resume than it actually is in real life.

I guess I know  
what it means to  
be a big girl now.

I stare at my closet. Which blazer? Which one will make me look like a dignified and professional coffee maker? I look at my watch: it’s already 6:30! I grab the navy blazer with gold buttons that I got last week on sale at Target. I walk across the room of my studio apartment and open the refrigerator door. No eggs, no milk, no juice—no breakfast. I close my eyes and try to relax. I get it, G-d. I have to schedule a big trip to the supermarket after work, You have made that very clear.

I run down to the subway station through the unexpected rain, silently cursing myself for forgetting my umbrella. One more thing to add to this “great morning” list. The subway is as crowded as ever. I can feel the man behind me breathing down my back as I am pinned against the damp, metal doors. The air (or lack thereof) is suffocating. The summer heat and the humidity of the misty rain, combined with packed-like-sardines subway

car, is unpleasant to say the least. It is at this time that I wish I was 5'11" and towering over all the sweaty faces around me.

Suddenly the lights go out as the subway comes to an abrupt stop. An announcement by the conductor is faintly heard: "Expect delays. Male teen jumped into the tracks." I try to hold back my tears. Could this day be any worse? Who in their right mind would jump into the subway tracks, stranding thousands of people in the steaming hot subway and then make them late for work?! I try to take a deep breath and relax but there is no way to take a deep, relaxing breath in these conditions. So I wait. I close my eyes and try to think of my vacation (in about 11 months): the sun, the beach, the palm trees. I picture myself at the pool at my grandmother's condo in Miami Beach, the place I used to visit during school vacations. Ah. I can feel the cool, ocean breeze. My thoughts lead me back to my carefree high school years. With a sense of surprise, I find myself thinking, "How I yearn to return to those blessed days. How I wish I was not a grown woman with so many responsibilities demanding discipline and structure." I find that I am yearning for the days when I meandered into school, ice-blend coffee in hand, surrounded by my friends. Days when I wasn't the one who needed to shop, cook, clean, and pay rent for myself. I start to feel sorry for the young man who jumped onto the train tracks. I feel sorry that for some reason he was unable to enjoy his teenage years and take advantage of every second. Oh, the precious feeling of being cared for. Of having someone anticipate your needs and prepare your lunches.

As the subway car starts to lurch forward once more, I am starting to understand what it means to be a grown up and I am wondering why I was in such a rush to get here. I guess I know what it means to be a big girl now.

# When the Old Set In

by Chayala Friedman

The day I learned it—it was yesterday. I just gazed at myself from the tinted windows of a parked Lexus on the way to Mott's, and I knew:

I was an old man.

Maybe it was in the way my hand twitched when I shuffled for change on the way to work. Or maybe it was how I looked at Mott's kid when he sprinted down the street to Barkley's Auto his first day on the job.

But maybe being old is more familiar to me than I'm letting on. To be old and to live past the bruises and bumps we like to call a long time. I'd promised my father medical school and broken that promise all before I was 20. And I've shattered many windows in my life with fastballs and shoe fights. And that time with the lampshade. I've been to my share of funerals and my fill of parties. I've never missed a Bruins hockey game. And when I was thirteen, I promised my younger brother Randy I'd take him to Hollywood when I could drive. Another broken promise.

And now I like to go to Mott's on Thursdays to watch the game after work. I cut the meat at the local Key Food two blocks from my apartment. I donate to the dog shelter off the corner, and sometimes I leave cans of tuna fish for the stray cats behind my building. So I like to think I'm a decent person and that somewhere in that old book of everything, it says I've lived it out full. But I'm definitely an old man.

There's a way all old men get when we figure out we've become old. We start to watch the birds more, and we begin to notice when someone's left yesterday's paper on the train. And sometimes, when we've gotten really old and have lost all our self-dignity and tolerance for social cues, we pick those papers up nonchalantly and read them on a park bench when no one's around. We take advantage of our senior status at the library, and we check out a lot of those old documentaries on the war. Some war. I don't know. I haven't been old for that long yet.

But today was that first time I knew for sure. I looked down at my white butcher's coat and there were small traces of blood and dabbling

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the birds more,  
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on the train.

grease at the sleeves, and all I could think of was how a million years later I was in that white coat, Dad. Somehow, way down the line, where people usually turn off onto the service road to get a bite and catch a few quick stretches before heading on down to the highway, I'd finally gotten myself into some white coat. Almost. But it really wasn't the same. And remembering myself some 42 year ago at 20 in the shadowed hallway where I told my father his son would never be a cardiologist—that made me feel old. Old and just the slightest bit bored. Like being on the carousel for the ninth time. Or watching the same fly behind the storm window trying to get through the screen to the outside.

And I realized just how many promises I've broken. And how many cans of albacore I'd put down in my life near the back steps where some fifteen cats like to skulk. And how many old dogs I'd saved. And also, how many times I'd actually been on a blitherin' carousel. And I decided that becoming an old man was just like watching a losing Bruins' game. Kind of disappointing, but hey, they'll be on again next Thursday. And there'll be more beers in the fridge.

# Yellow

by Tamar Skydell

“The day I learned I was different...” an elderly woman whispers hoarsely. She ignores the stream of tears that flood her wrinkled cheeks. “The day I learned...” She raises a trembling finger in the air and shakes it emphatically, her voice cracking with emotion. “I learned I was different was when...” The old woman sighs deeply, closes her tired eyes that are heavy with the burden of her past and is suddenly transported back to her childhood...

Zehava Halbeau smiles wistfully as she gazes out of her bedroom window. Oh, how she yearns to rush into the mounds of leaves that pile up in the park across the street. She wishes to jump into the yellow leaves; she longs for the satisfying crunch of the leaves beneath her shiny, leather boots.

Yellow. Yellow leaves.

Zehava’s plump lower lip trembles with nostalgia as she thinks about her lacy yellow dress. She remembers when the men in the green uniforms and angry faces came into the cottage. They shouted nasty things at Mommy and took away her pretty yellow dress. Zehava hated those men.

Yellow. Yellow dress.

Zehava reaches into her drawer and pulls out a small candy wrapped in yellow paper. Monsier Basch, the old toymaker, gave her that candy a few weeks ago. Her mouth tightens with confusion as she wonders why he ignored her when she went to visit him last. Why did dear, cheerful Monsieur Basch turn away when she ran up to him? Maybe it was because she was bragging too much about her math test. But why did he scream so loudly? Why did he shove her out of his little shop and yell in his growly voice to never come back?

Yellow. Yellow candy.

Zehava shoves the candy back into the wooden drawer and, instead, reaches down for the silver medal that is hidden between two schoolbooks. She picks the medal up and stares angrily at its intricate designs. She wonders why Mrs. Bardon made her sit down during the spelling bee. Zehava

**Why did he shove  
her out of his little  
shop and yell in  
his growly voice to  
never come back?**



was about to win the entire competition! Instead, Mrs. Bardon calls Emilie with the beautiful, yellow hair up to the front of the room and declares her the winner. Zehava should've won that medal. When she approaches Mrs. Bardon after class to complain about this horrible injustice, Mrs. Bardon huffs quietly and slaps a silver medal into her hands, "Zehava. You do understand why you cannot win first place in the competition." Zehava nods wisely, even though she does not understand why she couldn't win the gold medal. After all, she won the spelling bee! When she informs her mother of Mrs. Bardon's cruelty, her mother only shakes her head sadly and wipes her misty eyes.

Yellow. Yellow hair.

Zehava lets out a sigh of frustration and glances down at her woolen sweater.

Yellow. Yellow star.



# The Day I Learned We Must Remember

By Michal Cohen

# Leaving Johnny Behind

by Adina Feder

The day I learned my brother had joined the army, I cried. My mother, however, was inconsolable. She spent the entire day mourning the irrevocable loss of her favorite child. I was unsure of what to do so I made some hot tea and knocked softly on her door. When I heard sniffles, I awkwardly dropped the tray outside her room and fled.

Whenever my mom got like this, Johnny calmed her down. Without him, we were like two sides of a magnet that refused to touch or connect. We were polar opposites and he was our common denominator. Now we were lost, struggling to find our footing in the black hole of confusion Johnny had left behind. Johnny always knew what to say, but I had always

My mother and  
I continued to  
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felt like I was just there next to Johnny. I was the third wheel trying to roll along with my mother and Johnny. He always related naturally to my mom, while I can coexist indefinitely with her without the slightest communication. I wasn't needed. That was the way it was, and in a strange way I liked it like that. Nothing was expected of me. All my mother's hopes and dreams were pinned on him.

The morning when Johnny had come down to breakfast dressed in his army uniform, my mother had turned around from the scrambled eggs and gasped, immediately understanding. She sobbed, loud, heart-wrenching cries while I glared at him. He wasn't supposed to leave us—I was. I was supposed to go to college and never return. How could he be the one to abandon us? He held us together.

That night after he had gone, my mother and I sat down to a dinner where the only audible sounds were the clinking of dinner plates and shiny silverware. It went on like this for ages. Our home – we – dreadfully awaited his return. The cupboards became dusty, and the floors grew weary with neglect and waiting. Words remained unsaid, cries became inaudible as my mother and I continued to live parallel to one another, coexisting but never corresponding. The only time our lives overlapped was when the shrill shriek of the house phone or the doorbell would reverberate throughout the house. We would both jump up and hold our breath only to discover it was a telemarketer or a neighbor calling to borrow some eggs. My mother

would shuffle slowly back to her room. I was always left standing alone, wondering where to go.

Months passed, and we grew further and further apart. I started applying to colleges. Then we got the call.

It was someone from the army—just not the someone we wanted to hear. This voice was hoarse and raspy while Johnny’s voice was smooth and syrupy. I looked over at my mother who was anxiously trying to make out what was being said on the other end. I nodded slowly, the salty corrosive tears escaping my eye and rolling gradually down my cheeks. She froze, unwilling to comprehend, and I uneasily went over and tried to hug her. Her entire body shuddered from her sobs, and the house shrunk to a shell of its former self.

For days, I lied sullenly in my bed while the dishes remained in the sink. My mother wouldn’t leave her room. Then, the Sunday after the phone call, she appeared like an apparition on the top of the stairs. She was carrying a few cardboard boxes.

“We’re moving out,” she calmly stated. I watched, shell-shocked, as she grabbed more and more items and callously tossed them into boxes. For the next few days, I watched her robotically pack up everything we owned. Every last bowl, knick-knack, and lampshade was unceremoniously shoved away. The only room that remained untouched was Johnny’s. I quietly worked beside her gathering up the life we had made in large cardboard boxes, making sure that everything would be kept safe, nestled in mounds of packing peanuts. Making sure nothing would break.

Moving Day arrived. As my mother packed the truck, I snuck away, back into the house and upstairs. I needed to take one last look at Johnny, his room. It was still, silent—exactly as it had been since the day he left. His bed was neatly made and all of his clothes were still hanging in the closet. I felt a pang of guilt as I examined his posters on the wall, the glow in the dark stars stuck onto his ceiling. What would Johnny say if he knew we were just leaving him behind? I tried to think but his words wouldn’t come to me.

The trunk horn honked. My mother was calling for me. She needed me. Finally. I swallowed hard and shut the door behind me. I took the steps two at a time down to where my mother was waiting in the empty front hall. I squeezed her hand and quietly walked her outside to where the moving truck was waiting for us. Johnny had left and now we were, too.



# The Day I Learned To Communicate in Silence

By Orya Abraham

165

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# 7

Section

## To Listen To My Voice

# To Listen To My Voice

by Rivka Salhanick, Editor

We all have moments of courage. Usually it's in those quick, twinkling moments under the sheets and covers of our beds, committing to conquer the fears or worries of tomorrow's world; however, after that second sip of coffee the next day, we feel hardly more courageous than a mouse (and quite a bit smaller than the strong, forceful world that seemed so defeatable the night before.) There are few of us, though, who maintain that determination to battle with our fears and listen to our inner voice.

In "*Calvin and Hobbes* and a Plate Full of Cookies," Ahuva Fohrman's carefully crafted character discovers "how much I cud do in this world if I put my mind and wilpower towards it." Both Ahuva's character and Tova Schwartz's character Hila in "Speaking of Moving On" know that progress takes time, that there is no overnight solution. Hila will never give up her dream of reuniting with her real father, but she realizes that she has the ability to move on. So too does Ahuva's character realize that she absolutely does possess the ability to read.

In contrast to these two pieces, which give us a peek into the characters' inner struggles, "A Season and a Sentence" by Sheindel Rusanov shows us the effort of a team: Ms. Janie and Molly, who are dedicated to overcoming an adversary with joy. They work together to succeed, even if that small success is the reading of one small sentence. The crucial point in overcoming a difficulty is often accepting a mentor or friend to help you through the difficult time. However, Sharony Polinsky's "Around the Classroom in A.D. Days" raises the issue, what happens when that mentor's voice collides with your own: Is a teacher's instruction more important than an imaginative mind? Sharony has created a young boy, who suffers from A.D.D. and captured a moment in his life as he struggles to keep control in his classroom.

The inborn human fear of being perceived as abnormal or 'crazy' often keeps us from expressing the most unique parts of ourselves; this fear is brought to the forefront in Hadassah Penn's "True Colors," in which Amalie contains her abilities as a synesthete once she realizes that other people do not share her color experiences. That is, until her progressive teacher encourages her to express her true colors. Amalie's story flows similarly to Rachel Retter's "Silent to the World," where we experience the world from the viewpoint of one who is labeled deaf but appreciates communication perhaps more than those of us with hearing; Rachel's character can "hear



the dry crunching of fallen leaves by absorbing the feeling of them”—she only wishes that her silence would not separate her from those around her.

And then there is the eternal question presented in Chani Weiner’s piece “Impulse: Don’t Purchase”: How do we listen to our inner voice of truth? When push comes to shove, it is only you who makes the final decision, and that decision will shape who you are. It takes a moment of temptation for Chani’s character to realize who she truly is.

Whatever the problems we face may be, they all teach us to listen to the courageous voice, the truthful voice, the imaginative voice, and the thousands of other voices that are calling out inside of us. The writers in this section present these voices artfully and poignantly for you to enjoy.



# The Day I Learned To Write

By Yaffa Jacobson

# *Calvin and Hobbes* and a Plate Full of Cookies

by Ahuva Forman

The day I laerned how to raed, I was in eith grad. It was my furst day back in scool after being abcent for about one week. I dicided that I was never going bac to scool agan becuas everyone was always making fun of me that I was so dum and I would never be abl to laern anyways. I started to convinse miself that they were right; wat was the point of going to scool if I faled all my tests since the beganing of the yaer. I decedent even understand sience, wich is usuly my favrit subject. That week, I folowed a stable scedual every day, where I staid in bed all morning, wached some TV later on, and at the end of the day, my mom and I sat down together and I agreed to try raeding for fifteen minutes. We wud set the timer, sit down with a plat of chocoelit chip cookees, and open Calvin and Hobbes, by Bill Watterson. We always started with hi hopes, tricking arselvs into beleiving that this time I wud actualy raed fluintly. However, at the end of the nite, screaming marches wud be hurd around the house, teers wud stre down my muthers face, and sometimes, even the naibors wud call to mak sur everything was okay. Wat my muther deedn't no was that I always went to bed with teers running down my face too; I was desapointed with miself that every other student cud raed and rite with ease, but I was the only one who casued my parents so much stress becuase their only child was so dum.

Aftr a week of plaiying hookey, even I new that it was time for me to come bac to scool. For som reeson that I cud not explane, this time I was convinced that I wud be able to lern, to undrstand, and to cach up in all of my classes. I wauked into English class with my hed held hi and a big grin on my face. Even tho this was my most difficult class, I was diturmaned to get laern like everyone else and sucseed like the kids my age. The class was starting a new novel cauled The Great Gatsby, by F. Scott Fitzgerald. My teecher began the class by telling us all that this auther was dyslexic and was kiked out of scool, but nevertheles succeeded and rote a book that was loved and remembred for generations. I felt like her words were direckted straite to me and for the next minut and a haf I was floting on cloud nine. Dreems were racing throo my hed about how much I cud do in this world if I put my mind and wilpower towards it. However, for a dyslexic kid like me, dreems such as these cannot last for long. The class started going arond the room, taking terns raeding the story out loud. As usual, when it was my tern, the student in frunt of me just skipped rite over me like I wasn't even

there, as I was excused from reading anything out loud in class. On the one hand, I was so relieved that I wouldn't have to embarrass myself in front of the whole class. On the other hand, I was so mad at myself that I couldn't just read like everyone else in the grade. I felt my face turn hot and my eyes threaten to overflow with tears. I quickly excused myself from the classroom before the kids would have yet another reason to make fun of me; I imagined "Cry Baby" being added to the other slew of nicknames I had acquired over the years.

Overwhelmed with emotions, I accidentally took the wrong turn and ended up facing the elementary school's principal's office. Through my tears I could see the sign up sheet for second and third graders for one-on-one tutoring in extra reading help. Without much thought going through my head, I penciled my name into the box for that day's lunch period and quickly turned the corner before I could change my mind. Period five came and I realized what I had rashly done. Mortified, I made my way to the second grade classrooms so I could explain to the teacher my mistake and go back to the lunchroom before anyone would notice.

However, when I finished my spiel, Ms. Katty was not willing to let me go. "I don't care if you are in second grade, eighth grade, or in graduate school. If you need help with your reading skills, you are going to sit your little bottom right down in this chair and we will review and review until you can read with your eyes shut!" So, my private reading lessons began... and continued for the rest of the month. Until I was able to go home that memorable day in eighth grade waving my Calvin and Hobbes book yelling, "Hey mom! Throw a batch of cookies into the oven and come sit down! Do you want to listen to me read?"

Dreams were racing through my head about how much I could do in this world if I put my mind and willpower towards it.

# Speaking of Moving On

by Tova Schwartz

“The day I learned how to, um... okay, I got a good one! The day I learned how to make an omelet was the day I moved to Israel. See, not so hard. Just make it short and concise, like mine. And don’t worry; you’re not talking to the prime minister, you’re talking to me.”

“The d-d-day I l-l-learned to b-b-b—I can’t!”

“Come on, Hila. Don’t do it for me, do it for you. Okay? Now start from the beginning.”

“The d-day I l-learned to b-braid my hair w-was the d-day that they t-took away my...my... m-my...”

“It’s alright. Here, let’s try a different topic. Do you ride a bike?”

“Maybe...”

“So, tell me about the day you learned to ride your bike.”

“But, y-you never let m-me talk about the o-other d-day.”

“Which day?”

“Y-you know, the d-day they t-took him away. D-don’t those p-p-people p-pay y-you t-to listen to me?”

“Hila, ‘those people’ are your parents now.”

“Maybe, b-but how l-long will that l-last? I’ll probably be in a d-different f-foster home in six m-months.”

“Hila, not now. Please.”

“You c-can’t tell m-me to stop. You have t-to listen t-to me; it’s your j-job.”

“Hila, when you walked into my office did the sign on my door say psychologist or speech therapist?”

“Speech therapist, but...”

“No buts. You’re here because you want to overcome your stutter, and I’m here because that’s my job.”

“I know, b-b-but...”

“End of story. We’re running out of time, and your father will be here to pick you up in 20 minutes.”

“He’s n-not my father.”

“We’re not going through this again. You were telling me about the day you learned to ride a bike.”

“N-no I w-wasn’t, you w-were.”

“Hila, you have to stop fighting me.”

“But everyone’s fighting me!”

“I never noticed. You don’t stutter when you shout.”

“E-everyone knows I d-don’t stutter when-- Hey! N-now you’re changing the t-topic. Y-you called him m-my father. He is not my father!”

“You’re not stuttering again.”

“Stop it! I know y-you d-don’t like w-when I talk a-about my f-father, m-my real f-father, b-but you c-can’t pretend he d-doesn’t exist. One d-day they’ll s-set h-him f-free; then he’ll c-come h-h-home to m-me, h-he w-will.”

“Hila, calm down. You’re getting yourself worked up.”

“I thought it’s g-good when I g-get w-worked up, b-because then I d-don’t stutter. You are m-my speech therapist; isn’t that w-what you s-said.”

“Hila, I’m going to be honest with you. I want him to come home, I really do, but thinking about him now isn’t helping anyone. Your father wants what’s best for you, and right now that means not thinking about him for the next 20 minutes and focusing on yourself. Okay?”

“No! It’s n-not okay! I-it n-never will be.”

“Hila, come on. You’re too old for tantrums.”

“B-but it’s n-not fair.”

“No, Hila, it’s not fair. But, what are you going to do? Are you going to sit in my office and complain or are you going to do something?”

“I d-don’t know?!?”

“I think you do know; you’re just too afraid to admit it.”

“S-so m-maybe I am, b-but what am I s-supposed to do?”

“First, you have to calm down.”

“I know it’s j-just... I w-wish that... It’s s-so hard. I want t-to m-move on, I do. But, I can’t help l-looking b-back and f-feeling... guilty. Why

is it f-fair for me t-to be h-happy when my f-father... you know. I'm n-not the l-little naïve kid I w-was when they t-took him. I know that j-jail isn't s-such a r-rosy p-place. I just feel so guilty being... happy."

"So you think being sad and not progressing is what your father wants?"

"Of c-course not..."

"Would knowing that you were happy and overcoming your stutter make him happy?"

"I g-guess so."

"So, what are we waiting for? Are you ready to do this, for you and for your father?"

"Yes, at l-least I'll t-try."

"So, let's start with the day you learned to ride your bike."

"B-but I d-don't know how t-to ride a b-bike."

"What? You said you did."

"N-no, I said m-maybe."

"This isn't going to be easy, is it?"

"Sorry."

"Don't worry. Like you said, I'm paid to do this. So how about you choose the topic. You talk better when you're passionate about what you are speaking."

"Um... ok. The d-day I l-learned to b-braid my hair was... n-not such a g-great day. But t-today is the d-day I l-learned it's okay t-to move on."

I know that j-jail  
isn't s-such a  
r-rosy p-place. I  
just feel so guilty  
being... happy.



# The Day I Learned To Ride The Waves

By Dena Skydell

176



# A Season and a Sentence

by Sheindel Rusanov

“T.a..h...e... b.e...oy...I... l.e...arm...ed.” Molly shut the book and slid her chair back, an angry scowl on her face. She looked so despondent, it hurt my heart.

“That’s it? Molly, come on! Just finish the sentence, hon. You’re doing a wonderful job!” Molly shook her head angrily.

“No. No more. I’m not reading ever, ever, EVER again. And I’m not wonderful, so don’t call me that. It took me a thousand years to read that one sentence.” Molly slumped back down in her chair and crossed her arms.

“Nonsense, Molls. That took much less time than last week. You’ve obviously been practicing.” I reopened the book, only to have her stick out her hand and shut it again.

“I was practicing, Ms. Janie! I try reading all the time when you’re not here, but it’s a ton easier when you’re here to help me. ‘Cuz when I look at all these words, I don’t see letters; I see squiggles and lines and circles and sometimes even smiley faces like the words are making fun of me—just like everyone else in my class does. But when you’re here to help me, you show me only a little bit of the letters at a time so I can read it like that.”

“So, why don’t you try to do that by yourself?” I grabbed two pages of the newspaper and handed them to my young scholar. “Here, cover all the words except for the first one on the page.”

Molly took the papers from my hands and gave a nervous giggle as she opened the book and covered everything besides “the.”

“Good, now tell me what that first letter is.”

Molly squinted at the book, looking at it from all angles before she responded. “F.”

I sighed. “Try again, Molly remember the ‘F’ is holding out his hands by his head and his tummy, right? This letter is holding out both hands by his head.”

Molly nodded; she remembered learning this. “Is it a T?” she whispered.

“You bet!” I exclaimed. “Molly, what sound does the T make?” Molly caught on to my excitement.

“T goes TaTaTaTa like Train and Toy and Tiger!” She leaped around her bedroom, pointing to all the objects she was naming.

I laughed, her enthusiasm contagious. “Super Duper! Now tell me the next letter that you see.”

She squinted at the next letter, trying to concentrate, and finally looked up with a shy grin. “It’s the letter that kinda looks like a ladder, so it’s an H right?” She beamed as I nodded and held out my hand for a high-five.

“Wow, Molly, look at what a great job you’re doing! This is a little bit tricky, but I think you can figure this out. You ready?” She nodded; it seemed like nothing could make that smile fade. “What sound do you get when you put a T and an H together?” She looked at me like I was dumb.

“Ms. Janie, that’s a silly question. Everyone knows that it goes teha.” I slowly shook my head.

“Isn’t that so silly? Who made up that T and H don’t say ‘teha’? Actually the silly person who made it up, decided that it should sound like ‘Th’ instead.” Her face fell. “Can you give me a word that has a ‘th’ in it?”

She pondered the question for a few moments before perking up. “Think, like right now I’m thinking really hard, and thunder, ‘cuz it’s raining, and thief, ‘cuz no one likes them, and also thick, like this new pink marker.” As I nodded, her smile returned in full blast.

“Wonderful! You’re doing such a great job. Let’s just finish this word.” She mock saluted me.

“Yes, ma’am. That letter all the way at the end is a... hm, well it isn’t a C ‘cuz that’s like a circle, and it isn’t an O ‘cuz that’s in my name and I know what it looks like so...Ms. Janie, is that an E?”

“You bet it is! Now, I know you know what sound it makes, right?” Molly nodded and opened her mouth wide like at the doctor’s office. “Eeeehhhhh!” She shouted with her tongue out as far as it could go. We both laughed.

“Marvelous! Now let’s put all that together, think you can do that?”

“THE!” she exclaimed, her face aglow with accomplishment.

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Weeks went by, with our sessions progressing slowly but steadily. As the first snow of the year began to fall, Molly and I were on the last word of that first sentence. The newspaper covered all the words except for the one Molly had her finger on. She moved her finger slowly, sounding out each letter as she went on.

“T...o...d...a...y...toooday. Ms. Janie! The last word is today!” I nodded and removed the newspaper.

“Now let’s read the whole sentence, okay?” Molly took a shaky breath and flashed me a huge grin.

“The day I learned to read was today.”

I’m not reading  
ever, ever, **EVER**  
again.





# The Day I Learned How To Learn

By Miriam Liebling

179

# True Colors

by Hadassah Penn

The day I learned I wasn't crazy was the day I learned the word "synesthesia."

It started at the beginning of fourth grade. There was a new girl in my class, so I went over to introduce myself.

"Hi, I'm Amalie. What's your name?"

"Hi, my name is Ally."

"Orange and blue? Those are my favorite colors! Your name is so cool!"

There was an uncomfortable pause as Ally looked at me blankly.

"Um... thank you?" she said hesitantly.

That was when I realized that not everyone saw the colors.

I decided to investigate. When I got home that day I approached my sister Hazel. Better make this quick, I thought, noting her scowl and her open textbook.

"Hazel," I ventured.

"Yeah?"

"Can I ask you something?"

"Okaaay...?"

"Um, what color is the letter A?"

"Excuse me?"

"What color is the letter A? Is it reddish-orange? Or—"

"Amalie, I don't know what you're saying. Can you please leave me alone?"

"Okay, I'm going!"

Slightly anxious, I hurried to find my mother. I located her in the kitchen, washing dishes.

"Ma, what color is the letter A?"

"I don't know, Am. I guess it depends on what you're writing with," she said absentmindedly.

Desperately, I asked her, "It's not always the same color?"

"Of course not, honey," she said, turning back to the dishes.

“Okay...bye, Mom.”

Perturbed, I went to my room and sat down on my bed. I grabbed a book from my night table and opened it up on my lap. The letters looked the same as they always did - A's were reddish-orange, B's were neon green, C's were lavender. Every number and letter a distinct color. Why didn't anybody else see the colors? I wasn't imagining them...was I? Maybe my brain was just messed up or something.

I decided that day that I wouldn't mention what I saw to anybody else. I couldn't stand the thought of being perceived as crazy.

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## Ma, what color is the letter A?

In April of seventh grade, Miss Mailer, our young, “progressive” science teacher, decided that we would be doing neuroscience experiments for science fair, instead of the usual plant-growth experiments, and we would be performing them on our fellow classmates. That's how we ended up in line for Claire and Avery's project.

“So, our experiment is to prove this thing called the Stroop Effect. We're trying to determine if we give you guys the names of colors, like, written in different colors, which one will be faster - reading the actual word, or saying its color. Like, it'll say 'Red' in blue ink, or 'Green' in yellow ink. We'll put you guys into two groups and we'll ask some of you to say the color of the word, and some of you to read the actual word. So, here goes.”

They went on to split us into two lines and Miss Mailer stood between them, observing. I was in Claire's line, which meant I'd have to say the color of the word. Okay, I thought, this should be easy. When it was my turn, I took the paper Claire handed to me and glanced down at it. “So,” I started, “the first one is gray-yellow-magenta-magenta-gold, the second one is purple-turquoise--” but Claire interrupted before I could continue.

“Amalie, what are you doing? Are you joking?”

“What? No! I'm just saying the colors!”

“Um, no, 'cause those aren't the colors! The first word is 'green,' and the second is 'pink'!” She stopped and glared at me. “This isn't funny, Amalie.”

“Seriously, Claire, I'm not joking!”

“Then what are you doing?”

all. With each sentence, I got more excited. “A synesthete might see the word ‘plane’ as yellow or the number ‘4’ as crimson.” “Synesthetes do not actively think about their perceptions; they just happen.” This was totally me! “I spent hours living there, letting it all sink in. What an unbelievable day. When I learned that there is nothing wrong with me, I finally let go of a burden that was weighing on me for years. I realized I am unique, and I like, yellow and purple and turquoise, or something.”

“Amalie, did you understand the instructions?”

“Yes! I’m doing what I’m supposed to, but Claire is saying that I’m wrong!”

“Amalie, may I speak with you outside for a minute?”

“Fine, but I’m telling the truth!”

I followed her out of the classroom. Standing in the hallway, Miss Mailer asked me gently, “What happened in there, Amalie?”

“I don’t know! Claire told me to say the colors, so I did. I don’t know what I’m doing wrong.”

“Hmmm....do you usually see colors when you see or hear words?”

“I guess... but I don’t really pay attention to them anymore.”

“Amalie, is it possible that you have synesthesia?”

“Synesthesia? I don’t know. What’s synesthesia?”

“It’s a neurological condition where one of a person’s senses will trigger another. Someone with synesthesia might hear sounds when they see colors or taste flavors when they hear sounds. I think you might have grapheme-color synesthesia, where you always see letters and numbers as specific colors.”

“Wait, so that’s a real thing, seeing letters and colors? It’s not, like, just me? I’m not crazy?”

“Not at all. It’s really pretty common - I think about one in two hundred people. There are tests and research you can do online if you want to understand more.”

“Okay. And, Miss Mailer? Thank you so much.”

I rode out the rest of the day as quietly as possible, avoiding Claire and Avery. When I got home, I Googled “synesthesia” right away. Links popped up, and I printed article after article, then lay down on my bed to read them



# The Day I Learned We All Start Off Curious

By Devora Kayla Pomrantz

# Around the Classroom in A.D. Days

by Sharony Polinsky

The day I learned...I look up. "Write!" Mrs. Felick puts her finger in my cursive workbook. "Focus," she says. I look down. Hey, the page number is crooked. It says 12 slanted. Let me check if the other page numbers are slanted too or just this one. 33, 34, 37. Oh. I skipped. Let me go back. What was that I saw? Turn the page...turn the page. Aha! Someone scribbled "Jason Rox" all over page 44. And with permanent marker!!! He could get in trouble for that! I must find him. Where does he sit...psst. PSST! I am not loud enough. I need to climb on to my knees to tap Jason on the shoulder and let him know. He must stop using permanent marker in the school's math textbook. I bang the back of his desk, I kick my sneaker toward his chair. I throw my pen at his ear. Why doesn't he turn around? I feel a poke on my scalp. Who's bothering me now? I must get through to Jason! Don't you see I am occupied?!? Oh. It's Mrs. Felick. Her mouth is moving. I look at her glasses. They are crooked...and so dirty. Full of smudges. My eyes travel around the rectangular plastic brown frames. The brown is sort of glinty, greenish even. How do they make that color? And WHERE is the name of the company? It's always on the inner right side of the frame. Sometimes it says MADE IN CHINA in block metallic letters. Here it says...what does that say? Squinting I reach forward...where is it...I almost have them. Ouch! I feel another poke. A tugging on my wrist. I need those glasses. Mrs. Felick speaks, "What do you think you're—Their going to break!" I see the brown glinting frames land peacefully on the floor. The glass rectangles are piled neatly one on top of the other a whole square yellow tile away from the frame. There it is! I see the company name, now that the frame is facing me, bent at just the right angle for me to read: LAFONTE. What language is that? A huge black shape hops over. It covers up the name. A fly! Does it have wings? The short paired ones or one big one? I lean down...down, almost there...out of my chair. Hands grab my arms trying to move me. But

I bang the back of  
his desk, I kick my  
sneaker toward  
his chair. I throw  
my pen at his ear.  
Why doesn't he  
turn around?



I am so close to it. Why are you pulling me away?!? Slam! I am down and out of reach of those annoying hands. Right there, up close is the fly. It has one wing or...I put out my finger. It must be steady or I won't see. Steady.... Where'd it GOOOOO??? Ahead of me on the windowsill I see it hopping left and right. It taunts me. I bolt off the hard tiles, my hands out, ready to make the pounce and uncover this mystery. I climb up the wall onto the sill. Someone grabs my shirt collar. I pry the fingers away, my eyes on the fly. I count two paired wings on either side. I need to lie down on the windowsill after this exhausting chase...Wow. There is a piece of crepe paper hanging from the light. I want to fold it like a fan. That is the best type of paper for making fans. Now I am standing up on the windowsill. Not high enough. I can't reach it! Help! Mrs. Felick catches my leg as it slips off the surface and pushes my eyes up close to her face. "Focus," she says. "You need to copy these sentences in script." I stare at her lips. I need to copy these sentences in script.

# Impulse: Don't Purchase

by Chani Weiner

The day I learned the hard way was the end of my high school experience. It was a slow Saturday night when I was sitting at home in my room with the air conditioner on full blast. I kept glancing at my email, waiting for something interesting to pop in. I was so ready to do something fun; the weekend was almost over and then it would be back to school. DING! As if she had read my mind, Olivia texted me.

“hey clare u up 4 the mall?”

“def :) “

Fifteen minutes later, we were in her mother's car headed for the mall. When we arrived, we thanked her mom and ran straight to Bloomingdale's. We bounced through the aisles, touching everything in sight until Olivia spotted the makeup counter.

“OmiG-domiG-d, Clare, we HAVE to get makeovers!”

I looked at Olivia and sighed. The thought of makeup on my clean, fluffy pillows at home held me back.

“Well, I don't know...” I said tiredly.

Olivia was quick to respond, “Trust me, it's a great idea.”

I sat down in the upholstered chair, frowning.

“Get over it, Clare. It's just makeup, not hair dye,” Olivia teased jokingly. The lady brought the blush brush up to my cheek and started stroking. When she was finally done, I glanced at my reflection.

“Hmm...not that bad. Look at my eyes; I actually really like this mascara,” I told Olivia.

“You look soooo good. Let's take a pic for my phone!” she answered, not even hearing me. As we left the makeup counter Olivia lazily picked up a shirt and glanced at the tag. After much inspection, she replaced it on the rack and started heading towards the exit.

“Wait,” I exclaimed. “I want to see which mascara the lady used.” I started back for the makeup counter as Olivia lingered by the doorway. I scanned the room quickly. The makeup artist was bustling about helping another customer, and no one was really paying attention to me. I felt a force come over me. Without a thought in my head, I pocketed the mascara wand and headed towards Olivia.

”Ready to go?” she asked.

I smiled at her shakily – what had come over me?!?

“Yup I’m all set.” We walked out together, not a single beeper sound, and waited for her mother to come pick us up.

The next few days I trudged around on stiff legs. The guilt was worming its way through my heart, but I just couldn’t forget the feeling of excitement as my fingers wrapped around that shiny wand in my pocket. At times I felt the need to run back to Bloomingdale’s and tell them what I had done, but I just couldn’t. If I did, that would mean I was regretful. And I wasn’t.

.....  
If I did, that  
would mean I was  
regretful. And I  
wasn’t.

One day in school Olivia complimented me on my lashes.

“Wait a second, is that the mascara from Bloomingdale’s?”

“Um....uh....yeah, isn’t it great?” I stammered.

Olivia narrowed her eyes at me. ”But you never ended up buying it. I saw you the whole time, you were just looking.”

And then it suddenly hit her. I could tell by the look of pure innocence on her face that she was shocked. She shook her head.

“How could you, Clare? I’ve known you my whole life...”

“Olivia...” I began, but it was too late. She had already started on her heel and left me standing there alone.

In the weeks that followed, I felt shattered into a million tiny pieces. While Olivia slowly moved on to a new group of friends, I was left to wallow in my guilt. Word of what I had done spread like sand in the wind, and soon no one was talking to me. I got weird looks and was totally ostracized. My high school experience was completely ruined and I was never able to fully recover socially.

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I was with my mom in Macy’s a few weeks later when I saw a pair of small, ruby earrings. The box had been left out by a salesperson that

had just finished helping a customer. My mom was at the cashier paying for a new set of china that she had picked out. I felt the old familiar feeling take over as I quickly stuck the little velvet box into my purse. Just then, my mom turned and signaled that we were leaving. Heart pounding, I walked toward her briskly. As we neared the exit and those metal detectors, I couldn't breathe. All those guilty thoughts and feelings came flooding back to me. I couldn't face those consequences again.

“Hold up!” I yelled. I ran back to the counter and replaced the earrings.

As I walked out the door, I felt so much lighter. I smiled for the first time in a long time thinking to myself, “I already learned the hard way once. I don't need to do it again.”

# Silent to the World

by Rachel Retter

The day I learned to speak never came. As a baby, I started off as if I had walked straight off the pages of a parenting magazine. I rolled over when I was two months old and sat up at five months; I was crawling at month number seven and walked on my own by eleven months. But it all went downhill from there. When I was twelve months old, my mother waited excitedly for me to reach my next grand milestone: talking. At first, she was excited; as the time passed, she became impatient; and when I was almost three years old and had not uttered a single word, she grew desperate.

I was taken to doctors, and the worst was confirmed: I was deaf and, therefore, mute. When most people refer to my disability, they call it deafness, as if my inability to speak is just an afterthought. I find it ironic because in my silent world, the majority of my disadvantages do not come from my lack of hearing. Hearing is only one of five senses, and I have learned to adjust my remaining four to compensate for the missing one.

I live in New York, the city that never sleeps. It is the busiest city in the world, but despite my deafness, I don't miss a thing. I hear the blaring car horns by reading the expressions of New Yorkers gripping their steering wheels with fury. I hear the dry crunching of fallen leaves by absorbing the feeling of them crumbling to dust underneath my feet. I hear the sizzling of the blackened grills by inhaling the smoky aroma of whatever food the street vendor is selling. I hear the thundering gusts of wind by watching them whip through hair, whirl debris across cracked sidewalks, and mercilessly tear down fire-colored leaves from New York's puny trees.

Hearing in my own way is a part of my life that I have learned to accept. However, my alternatives for speech will never fully compensate for my inability to express myself verbally. I have mastered the skill of reading lips, speak sign language fluently, and can read and write just like anyone else. My words are not locked inside of me, but I always feel as if there is something holding me back. Like someone who speaks a foreign language, I feel that no matter how close my communication is to everyone else's,

My words are not  
locked inside of  
me, but I always  
feel as if there  
is something  
holding me back.

there is always something that sets me apart and gives my message a distant tone. It prevents me from truly connecting with people, and I wish I could attain a higher level of communication so that I could forge closer relationships with the people around me.

One icy November day, I was walking down the streets of my city when I noticed a girl walking next to me who looked my age. Her long black curls and soft red scarf fell past her shoulders and rippled in the swirling winds. We both walked briskly, our heels slapping against the sidewalk as we strode against the harsh gusts of icy air. Her cheeks were pink like mine, and her bright eyes were focused on the glowing screen clutched in her shivering hands. Oblivious to her surroundings, she stared at her machine as if it held all of the answers to the mysteries of the world. Her unwavering gaze was an expression I had seen on many faces, and it never ceased to intrigue me. All I wanted in life was to be able to reach a higher level of communication that I felt I was unable to attain. Yet all everyone else was interested in was replacing this special type of communication with a more convenient imitation hidden behind a pixelated screen. While I was desperately wishing for more personal and gratifying communication, they were trying to replace it. I was the only one who truly appreciated how powerful and precious communication was, and I was the only one who felt deprived of it.

They call me deaf, but that is not how I feel. My greatest fear is not that the world is silent to me; it is that I am silent to the world.



# The Day I Learned That Courage Can Bring Hope

By Shifi Shulman



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