

RECURRENCE

Karen Alkalay-Gut

We shall act and we shall heed
blind repetition
teaching
meaning-
that revelation
that comes
in the half sleep
of the senses.

There were times
a line of prayer
would wake in me
such tenderness-
Sanctify our days
as of old-
that hunger to return
to something we know
only by that hunger

II

Dina, the old candlemaker,
bent over double so that she always faced
the earth, would rise mumbling
from her bench in the shul
with the last lines of “Etz Haim,”
and begin to walk down
the long aisle to the door
as the young rabbi began his drosheh
in English.

I was always amused, laughed together
with my mother at its regularity-
her toothless protest of the vernacular.
Now I see her
bending over the cauldron of tallow
dipping the wick
again and again
adding layer
to layer-
earthly even in the afterlife —
forming inviolate candles.

IN MEMORIAM

Emmanuel Moses, trans. Marilyn Hacker

I am the pilgrim of Tel Aviv
My holy land is there:
Between the azerdachs and the cafés.
Father, pray for us
Children of the north.

In Tel Aviv, in the heart
Of Tel Aviv, my beloved sleeps.
Birds make a canopy above her head.

Twelve million eyes watch us
— Oh, stars —
Twelve million eyes of pollen
Eyes of snow
Old man keep on praying

ROYAL BLUE

Emmanuel Moses, trans. Marilyn Hacker

(Berlin,2005)

Something unknown melts beneath our footsteps
the nights have left us nothing
photographs of what occurred are still discussed
but the predominant history
is that of churches' white roses

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Crush the fires of Prussia beneath a dark heel
every façade bleeds
bleeding, the trees strip themselves
the people are a flock of steaming pigs
on the way to the sty

*

There shall be no other center but the snow
cut short my breath O greatest light
covering the oaks beneath the old city walls
words doze in the wide sensual bed
where even green sap dares not wake them

DON'T DARE CLOSE YOUR EYES

Sarah Margles

our weaknesses are in our pathology,
ol-i-gee
wee
pee

our weaknesses are in our patholopee
because we're not drinking enough water
not letting the water wash us clean

holding my weakness like it's my last Jolly Rancher
my only pair of clean underwear
the last lemon square on the plate

holding my weakness
like holding my breath

my weakness is in my pathology, my path making
hiking down
leaving a trail of weak bits for to find my way back
but the bits get burned up in the sun
like a bad dream
like an orange peel
tossed, dried and covered with sand
lost in the desert
like my mind

like my ego
lost against the majesty of crumbling mountains
body humbled
soul at flight
a dragonfly feasting at mosquito season

my weakness is in my pathology
my paradigm
begging for change
searching for difference
shifting
with trust of instinct ^{over} intellect
of finding emotions _{buried}

perhaps my weakness holds me

like my father
wrapping his arms around me when I was five
his arms too strong
I would drop to the floor
poke out the hole of his doughnut hug

my weakness holds me because I let it

weakness splutters its last energies
 on the legs of a body moving toward faith
like a bus splashing a puddle of rain
 on a passing angel

walking toward God

covered in Gore-Tex
the angel laughs
and continues
 her
 path
 to Eden

GOOD TURN

Matthue Roth

Singing to old people
was our perfect good deed:
we couldn't sing
and they couldn't hear

Their deafness was our
Saturday afternoon salvation
after synagogue, we ate, prayed

and then headed in the direction
of wheelchairville USA
passing playgrounds
mini malls and
arcade game stores
those were for normal kids

we weren't normal
we were more than normal
we were Jews

Mitzvos were our mission
which our parents always taught us
meant good deed
when we became Orthodox
we learned mitzvah meant commandment

and the difference between
good deeds and commandments
was the difference between
buying someone flowers
and saving their life

Armed with nothing
but songbooks and our conviction
we hit the old age home,
dispersing like firefighters
through the corridors

They congregated in clumps
those old people
waiting for us

like families in the fifties crowded around radios
they watched every inch of our movements
noting our postures, the way our voices trembled

the sideways glances exchanged between us

an interplay of teenage drama,
who's rolling eyes at who this week
and does it change

These people have been here for years,
they have seen the chorus lines
come and go like their hearing
they know
nothing changes but the names
our cycle of observance
like evidence for evolution

They were once Orthodox
their children broke away
now the grandkids are
digging up traditions
taking on rules
putting up the borders
their parents tore down

On the third floor
my grandfather talks through the entire performance
telling anyone whose hearing aid is on
how his grandson is standing
in the fifth row back
trying to impress the old ladies
who smell like pee and can't even see
that far back
but they nod flirtatiously
figuring if there's kids around
whatever news he's spreading
can't be too bad

The sun's going down
by the time we leave
walking back up the boulevard
to synagogue

in front, Mendy and Yiskah
are planning out our night for us
6 p.m. Havdalah
8 p.m. roller skating
9:30 p.m. making out in the parking lot
the old people look at us
like they know
every impure thought in our heads
we don't hear anything they say
they don't hear anything
we sing

EMEK SHELI; *DIKAON*
David Druce

1: 'The apparition of those faces in the crowd petals on a wet, black bough.' –Ezra Pound

There is no Metrò in Afula
only the rulerstraight road,
this black gash of asphalt
cutting through fertile earth
that buried Dayan and Ramon
Chariots drowning in Yizraeli mud
vineyards lusted by kings
Queens torn, thrown to dogs
Tent-stakes nailed in skulls
Prince's head hung on the wall
Nahal Kishon rushing down the hill
I've learned about this town-
accidents must happen, it seems
to make outsiders aware of us

2: 'You Jews always try to push your way to the head of the queue' –Lord

Flowers everywhere in names
traffic circles, even on wild hills
I am the gardener of humanity
I must judge them, accounting
For the ancestry in their faces
My eyes gaze at thighs, at hips
for security purposes-of course.
My supervisor 'droopy moustache'
his humor as bitter as his coffee:
'Yallah, they are dying to get in'
but this is no selektzia flour and jeans are not rationed
Here the faces are dark with bright hair
Pants tight to hold in youth
That old women-Tehilim-for past or future

Who is the real Ezra?
That fated poet from Idaho?
Did he have muscles like mine?
And if I was not told to believe
In one god, angels, and prophets
Can I have a darkened room of techno?
And we wait for the executioner.
Praying her car is late.
Kol Shofar, Sisera's mother,
Belated sirens Are still dividing virgins
And then: camera lights hurry like ambulances
Enter the coroners of the heart who exhume

our fears, the moments of and say
'What's new in these screaming faces?'

What else made a 24-year-old woman
accessorize high heels with explosives?
Forget her. Shoot the corpse wrapped
In the 'Sharon will bring Security' banner
Describe the unclaimed cellular phones.
Talk to the mustachioed garinim vendor
Who wants to move to Canada
In shock, his radio still plays tawdry pop
'Bagadata Ba, Neshama Sheli'
I betrayed you, my soul
Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.
Kol Yisrael M'Yerushalayim.
'Who was shot and who fell there
-from Beit Alfa to Nahalal?' –Natan Alterman

FRIDAY

David Druce

Fog clouds apartments on St. Nicholas
And litter is strewn heavily; this Friday
'El Especialito' lies half open, immodestly
Every morning I awake with hope
To dash it on the subway wheels
The news always fogs my senses

A young woman sits, coffee in hand
Heels, the New York Times, hijab
In priority seating, late at 9:00 AM
and I stand-not taking other seats
yesterday, I who argued about body parts
today, staring at your sheitel deluxe

I should have more fun; volunteer that
I am an ecstasy dealer from Holon
Or an Ex-Hasid from New Square
For subway conversations
Are public secrets kept
Proof of what is and isn't printed

THE BIG YOU

Jessica Leigh Lebos

The moon rises as a clear sharp crescent
And the tea smells orange sweet
I sit in perfect meditative posture
Pen in one hand cigarette in the other
And think This is who I am!
Smoking, writing, biting off bigger ideas than I can chew
But enough with the small talk
What about You?
Is it true God needs love, too?
Is the right way to pray to give thanks first and ask for favors later?
What if We never get earth's shit together and destiny murders itself along
a zillion pointless ends?

I prefer to think of you as my friend
This presence that cares
But, Y'know, sometimes it seems like you're not really there
Like we're each trudging around all alone
But then I think of that corny poem
The one about two sets of footprints on the beach
And I have to admit it reaches me
Even though I'd rather stand back, roll my eyes and laugh at the Jesus
freaks

Even my father holds You up for ridicule
And I gather that it just ain't cool to talk about God
So I sit in this self-effacing cloud of smoke and choke
On the urge to share
But once in a while
In a cool, stained glass synagogue
I just wanna kick back my chair and shout out
Glory Hallelujah! to the rabbi
Glory Hallelujah! to my fellow Jews who know all too well the dangers of
drawing attention to themselves
Glory Hallelujah! like my heart-rich soul sisters in a Southern Baptist church
Glory Hallelujah! PRAISE THE LORD!

But that would be inappropriate on say, Yom Kippur
So my prayers take the form of these quiet questions to You:
Does is get lonely being the Only One?
Are we made not only in Your image but of Your confusion and missteps as
well?

How do we make sense of an apparent evil so dense
And is hell the high, shard-topped fence that shreds even the most faithful
confidence in You?

The moon glides West
As the present becomes past
I hear no answers from You
Just two bad-news teenage girls spitting on the ground
Oh wait—there's somebody dumping broken glass next door
Then the rustle-smack as a pack of cigarettes
Hits the floor

Then the wind dies down and I hear Your voice
Well, maybe not a voice, but a hum
Coming from underneath where the trees grow
Above the moon's glow
And I know
You are
What's beyond life and death

So I sit
Sipping orange tea with You
And remember that sound is only
And always
My breath

PESACH CLEANING
Jessica Sacks

Because we are free, we are cleaning.
Because there was no time for bread to rise
We don't use flour or beans,
And we clear out all our cupboards and
sofas and carpets and window-frames and
wardrobes, just in case, and make fires
of old news and bits of cake.

I don't know what the logic is to this and yet
I like it.
I switch on the radio, add
beat to my scouring –
This is what happens every
day in the ghetto, someone raps and I am scratching
at the cracks in the stove (dust is
chametz because slaves
have no time for dust
to settle). He sings out: *Let*
the mother fuckers see how
angry you can be, and I am sweeping dead
flies from the sills (flies
are chametz because slaves
have no time for the cobwebs
to form and the flies can fly away after the wind,
can plague
other people); *Don't know what*
it is about you keeps me coming back for more,
sings his girl and I am cleaning, I am trying to wipe
the pane
of the window of its grime because slaves
have no windows and no time
to look up; I am covering the
surfaces with tinfoil because slaves
have no surfaces or space to call
their own and when you're free
everything
reflects your face.

I want to clean
my words.
They will not wash.

I must put them out of sight, must try
to sell them to a stranger, but I know
it is a fiction and
no-one really buys; I must
hide them, and I know: words
are chametz because slaves
have no words except
the songs they sing in
unison to
slave to a
beat, to a
beat of other
people and I
turn
the radio
off.

It is spring and I am cleaning, for
all that I am worth.
My God will pour out
his wrath and I am cleaning
I am scraping at the walls because chametz
can rest even on a wall,
because slaves
have no ground to rest
upon; I am cleaning and I want to make
a fire of my words,
'may they rise,
please.' I shall say
to myself, let the
rest

be as the dust of the earth.

ON MY MOTHER'S *Yahrzeit*

(17 Adar II 5763 / March 20-21, 2003)

Yerra Sugarman

To *daven Maariv* I write this poem

The night sky follows

It is her hair

a boat I enter

lock and unlock the oars

deciphering narcissi and rain

The wheels of her wheelchair

reels on which the air snaps

in two and we watch again time

hang on a clothesline

the neighbor's stiff sheets clapping

Witnesses of nowhere else to go

we denied what lies through glass

the latticework of cracked

crops kneeling

through flagstones

stalk leaf purple flower

little resurrections that failed us

THE POET'S SABBATH

Chaim Strauchler

On Friday near evening,
my poet's pen put away,
this ornery voice of unredeemed rote
silenced by the merciless
trajectory of a setting sun;
I have not yet completed,
yet all is complete.

And as the day turns dark
I sing
and think of sadness
as a theological statement.
My joy chastises me, and
I rejoice in the pause and the peace.
God is good.

Now more than a week later
I reenter, pencil in hand
Knowing that my silence
Has been a vacuum
Inevitably filled
By another's sound

I stab the sunset
Loath to permit
Rest to end my
Creation.



HEAVEN
Shira Cantor

NADAV
Sara K. Eisen

Leviticus 10:1-3

Brother,
these rules will be the death of us:
this “how to please me”
this tutorial of the soul.
How can passion
wear a girdle?
Answer questions?
Wash?
Where is the sacrifice
in this ritual
if our flesh isn’t in it?
Our everything,
sewn together with time...
Brother,
this lust
grows dusty
with regulation
and waiting
and brain;
It’s the ancient inertia again.
Time we climbed out of the Egypt in ourselves...

When we were slaves,
we moved,
we cried;
The One We Long For
split the sea
for bony wretches in shrouds
- - in clouds.
And now:
Princes
in regal whites,
we lounge like old women - -
knitting our urges into underwear,
cozy and maddening
and pink.
Brother,
it will be
the death of us
to think.

(This poem was inspired by, and is imprecisely based on,
a shiur on Parashat Shmini given by Dr. Aviva Zorenberg).

THE MAGICAL REALIST OF AVE. J

Aaron J. Roller

Down the street walked the magical realist, his head hanging low, drooping into his chest so that his wild, untrimmed beard seemed to melt into the frayed lapels of his long, gray coat. His left arm held the strap of an overstuffed garment bag, steadying it and preventing it from swinging too severely against his legs. His right hand pulled a wagon which carried a neat stack of cardboard boxes. The exact number of boxes was hard to tell because they were packed so closely together, each one the same size, and each one tied on all six sides with medium size twine the way a bakery ties a package of bobka... each box, that is, except one, which, laying open at the top of the stack, revealed its contents as nothing but a stack of paper.

Though the wagon would tilt and veer every so often as its little rubber wheels, already taxed beneath the weight of so many boxes, met with the cracks and irregularities of the Avenue J sidewalk, the magical realist never turned around to check its status. Does that mean he didn't notice, as he slowly rolled the wagon past the Yeshivah of Flatbush, the breeze beginning to lift the pages from that single opened box? Was the dissemination of the pages along the crowded avenue not his desired effect? (And if it wasn't, why, then, hadn't he bothered to tie the box shut?)

As the magical realist continued into the busiest part of Avenue J, the street life that he'd studied so thoroughly passed before him, quickly this time, like a security blanket being pulled over the wide, absorbent eyes of a baby. There were the mothers in their customized wigs, pushing double strollers with one hand and intensely clutching cell phones in the other. The toddlers were out, lining up to ride the electric horse in front of J Clothing Stores, their blase minders, Polish or Caribbean maids, waiting in toe. So many students: some girls in denim skirts or cotton prints, others wearing the sharp pleats of uniforms. Some boys looked cockily rebellious, their yarmulkes tilted down on their heads to hide the defiantly long bangs they'd grown, as they lined up for a slice at Pizza Time, J2 or Netantya's (nobody went to Defara's since they served pepperoni). The magical realist knew them, but they wondered, as they watched the papers fly from that box, (first a few sheets, then dozens of them), where they recognized him from.

Maybe, they thought, as they bent down to pick up a fallen sheet, maybe he was in front of them in line at the librarian's desk at the Midwood Public Library, requesting some out of print poetry collection. Or, they'd recollect, as they folded the page into a knapsack or purse, perhaps he'd been drinking hot chocolate, alone, in the Dunkin Donuts, scribbling, scribbling, scribbling. Was he, they'd wonder, as their eyes began to wander across the smallish, well defined characters on the papers they'd found, the one feverishly reciting psalms in the last row of the synagogue?

But the question of identity was temporarily forgotten as the pages – no, call them what they really are – as the stories began to be read. With the paper hidden under her desk during Tanach class, Malka Rubinstine became quietly absorbed in a story called *The Date Trees*, in which two young lovers, Shlomo and Rivka, are forced apart by their unsympathetic and doctrinaire parents. Unable to meet, the two are reduced to staring at each other from the top floor of their parents' houses, which face one another from across the street. As they lean out their windows, mouthing words of endearment, great, loving tears drip from their eyes into small front yards, where the tears settle into the soil, take root and begin to grow. The tears turn swiftly into saplings which push their way up to become enormous date trees, whose thick branches extend just below Shlomo and Rivka's windows, allowing them to creep out among

the leaves, and meet between the houses, sixty or seventy feet above the dark street, where they could tell each other all the words that had been held back.

When Malka finished the story she folded the paper delicately, once lengthwise, once widthwise, and slipped it beneath her shirt against her chest. Then she raised her hand and asked to be excused to the bathroom, where she stood in front of the mirror and reread the story another three times, promising herself that tonight, she would read it again to David, the boy she'd been secretly talking on the phone with late at night...

With her baby finally napping and two hours till her four year old returns home from nursery, Chani Stein settled onto the couch with a cup of coffee and the story that blew into her shopping cart this morning. She reads a comical piece, which at first offends her, but quickly pulls her in.

It is called *The Sanctuary of Modesty*. In it, a husband becomes distraught that no one can help but notice that his wife has the roundest, most zaftig, most completely engrossing and distracting posterior in all of Brooklyn. The wife wears a long, puffy, goose down coat, but it doesn't seem to help. The rabbi – who, not being so different from his male congregants, has also noticed the problem – decrees that scaffolding be erected upon the wife's back that will cover her scandalous distraction. And so the story chronicles the engineering and construction of the wife's scaffolding and the pratfalls of her husband who must learn to build and dismantle the sanctuary of his wife's modesty.

Chani finished the story and laughed to herself, reflecting bitterly on how disinterested her Binyomin has seemed since the birth of their last child. "When Shaya wakes up from his nap," she told herself, "maybe I'll take a ride over to Miss Pauline's and buy a new nightgown, a red one, with lace. Then we'll see what Binyomin thinks of that."

Making his way to Coney Island Avenue, the magical realist settled at the bus stop, where the last of the stories flew out into the street and the now empty box fell from the wagon. Up and down the avenue, in restaurants and classrooms, in apartment lobbies and bedrooms, people read the stories. On the line at Blue Ribbon, Sylvia Blaustein read *The Public Intimacy of Matthew Liebowitz* and blushed a shade of pink no one had seen since Sylvia was seventeen. Behind the counter at Kosher Delite, Herman Katz's imposing belly vibrated and shimmied with laughter as he stood beside his meat slicer reading *The Things You Can't Take to the Next World*. And as Avi Shulman sauntered beneath the elevated train tracks, his eyes scanning a story entitled *Out of Reach, But Only by a Few Inches*, he stopped moving, looked around, and understood that he needed to repent for his misdeeds.

In the days that followed, the few curious enough to inquire found out that the magical realist had emerged from Tovah Moscovic's third floor, where Mr. Moscovic had unceremoniously evicted the quiet man who'd been paying rent on the converted apartment for the last twenty eight years in order to make room for his newly married daughter and son-in-law. As to where he had gone, that was anybody's guess. It's unclear if anyone saw the magical realist board the B68 bus with his wagon and his hanging bag. One little girl, Bracha Epstein, said she saw him carried away on a chariot of fire, but she may have just gotten carried away by the story she'd just read.

RANT

Adam Eliyahu Berkowitz

Okay, Mister Gonna-be-a-Rabbi man. I'm not gonna get into no contest about who ate more pork, did more drugs, went to more concerts, who used to be more cool so today he really does know better, just to prove that what I'm doing now is holy, holy, holy. You got the words pouring through your mind from some Holy Yid who was hooked up to God's light but that doesn't mean that if I listen to you I'm gonna feel any better about feeling worse. I'm out on the edge on my own and I'm leaning over to search for the last little crumbs of my soul that might have gotten left behind. Are you gonna help me or are you just using me to inflate your soul/ego so that you can float on home to Kansas to get a fat job and a nice suit? There's only enough room under your hat for you and I can't wear polyester pants 'cause they get messed up when I roll around in the mud. I don't need a fashion change or a cookbook or a list of restaurants that make me better than the next guy. I'M OUT HERE ON THE EDGE FIGHTING FOR MY LIFE AND YOU'RE TELLING ME WHICH BRAND OF CHICKEN TO BUY!!!!!! I need the real stuff. The only problem is I keep blowing it. Maybe that's the only way. I don't want to be right. I don't want to be the paragon of Jewish manhood. I don't want to be the man. I don't want baal tshuva groupies hanging on my every holy word. I need truth and I need it to be real, and I need it now. That means that yesterday is yesterday and that means that I need to be hanging out over the edge and I need a buddy who is hanging way out over the edge too. The problem with being out on the edge, with searching when I know that I don't know, is that sometimes I blow it. If I never blow it, then I wasn't really at the edge. I don't want to have what someone else wants. I want to know what I need to get closer. So get out of my face unless you're willing to take the chances and hold my hand when one of us felt something real that maybe hurt, maybe felt good, but definitely came from the heart. I don't need you because you're too damn right all the time. I need a wise man to show me the way, but you ain't wise. You know the right words, you know what wise sounds like, but you never took the chance that would let the words sink in. You never killed yourself for wisdom so inside of your wise words is a nasty little child waiting to pinch me when I get the answer wrong and watch me scream. I need a holy man to stick his foot in the door and keep it open so that I still have a chance to make it one day. Holy men are the real deal and they keep the world alive. But I ain't no holy man and I ain't never gonna be no holy man. I hate to break it to you, but you may have a closet full of white shirts and a nice supply of black shoe polish, you may have a shelf full of books with all the small print underlined, but you ain't no holy man neither. You can't be because there's too much of you and not enough of anything else. You're such a great man that when you walk in the room, God has gotta stand up and give you his seat. But what you could have been, what I need, is a friend. I need someone who is close enough to me, down here in all the mud and filth, so he can lend me a hand, pull me up when the mud gets too deep. To do that, he's gotta be down there deep in the mud, standing right beside me. He doesn't mind my smell and I don't mind his. We're gonna drag each other through until both of us make it, until we can jump into the mikveh together and play like little children at the water hole. And then, together, we're gonna walk on up the mountain, light a fire, and burn our sin offerings together.

EXHUMATION

Haya Pomrenze

Eyes closed, Sy Esterson suffered on El Al's Flight 71. His wife, Elaine, insisted on the aisle seat, so he was wedged in the middle where even the slightest movement caused discomfort. The situation was exacerbated when Elaine befriended the man in the window seat. Even with Sy's headset on, he could hear the buzzing of his wife's voice.

"He exhumed my mother-in-law's body for burial in Jerusalem," Elaine said in an intense whisper she reserved for words like cancer and lesbian. "We're not religious, but we believe in the holiness of the land. This is our second trip."

Sy raised the airflow from the overhead vent.

"We also believe in the sanctity of Jerusalem," the attentive listener said, smelling of mint chewing gum. Luke was on a pilgrimage to Israel with the Christian Messianic Church.

Elaine leaned across Sy; her elbow poked him in the sternum. Sy placed National Geographic between them as a buffer. "Fifteen thousand dollars, this whole process has cost," she said to Luke. "I wanted a cruise once we saved enough from his pension. Instead I got a trip to Israel."

Sy prickled at how easily she trivialized this important event. Actually, his decision to exhume his mother's body had come about accidentally, when the funeral home had a flooding problem from a defunct sprinkler system. Once his mother's stone needed to be moved, Sy reasoned, he might as well disinter the body for re-burial in Israel. He told people his mother's cousins had moved to Israel after the war and she'd had an attachment to the country.

"They escaped from Russia when Sy was just three," Elaine told Luke. "His mother was a widow."

"What happened to the father?" Luke lifted his eyes from *Receiving the Holy Spirit*.

"Killed in a pogrom or something like that." Elaine motioned vaguely with her hands.

As she outlined the bare bones of his life - his mother's illness that was always changing and never had a name, Sy's new caretakers, his childless aunt and uncle, - he actually derived some satisfaction at her meager account. His own memories were poorly focused like a broken kaleidoscope. He barely recalled his weekly stilted visits to a woman who had the bed covers pulled to her armpits, and the oppressive quiet in the room, except for the sound of magazine pages turning (she turned too fast to actually read them).

Elaine was now telling Luke how he'd gotten his accounting degree, graduating in the top third of his class.

Sy massaged his gray haired temples and turned up the volume on the *Ulpan* tape while searching his Hebrew-English dictionary for the words cemetery, shrouds, re-burial and sundown. He wanted to be prepared for the re-burial but unfortunately his compact dictionary had no word for that. CHECK ORIGINAL

Only yesterday, Sy had gone to Beth El cemetery in Riverwood, New York, to disinter his mother's remains. Rabbi Kagan, the young funeral home chaplain, had met with Sy twice before. He now placed his arm on Sy's arthritic left shoulder as they walked to the grave.

"Mr. Esterson," Rabbi Kagan cautioned. "The remains are usually decomposed after fifty years. Maybe you should wait in my office."

Sy hesitated. He had missed her funeral while a counselor at Camp Dora in the Catskills in the summer of 1950. His uncle called from the city to inform Sy of his mother's death, insisting that he not return for the funeral. A quick, quiet affair, his uncle had told him. You can sit *shiva* at the camp. He was given a room off the infirmary with a broken screen door where he completed the traditional mourning period. The mosquitoes paid more attention to him than campers or counselors.

"I want to see it," Sy told the rabbi. (Elaine had opted to wait in the taxi en route to the airport.)

He watched as three muscled men dug up the grave of his mother. He cleared his throat from the stirred particles of dirt. The workmen paused, blotted sweat from their faces with their forearms. It was a hot October with a touch of humidity

Rabbi Kagan slowly opened the coffin. He gasped even though Sy could not detect an odor. “Look at the bones! I’ve only seen bones intact twice before. Your mother must have been a special lady, a *tzadeikes*.”

Sy was surprised by the bones’ smallness. They were gray, almost black in some places and flecked with cracks. He remembered reading that the bones of the righteous are left intact. But Sy could neither verify nor negate the rabbi’s statement regarding his mother’s character. He had barely known her. The intolerable silent visits had tortured Sy and they dwindled from weekly to once a month so that by the time she died, she was more of a memory than a real person.

“You okay?” Rabbi Kagan asked. “When people don’t cry, I get nervous.”

“I’m okay, I’m all right.”

Sy watched as the rabbi displayed the bones in skeletal form. It was not a perfect skeleton - some bones must have decomposed. The rabbi placed them in a metal shipping container and scooped dirt from the coffin to gather the last remains. He splashed embalming fluid throughout the container as if squirting cleaning fluid on a car.

“*Esa Ainai El Ha’harim, Me’ayin Yavoh Ezri*,” Rabbi Kagan chanted Psalm 151 as he rocked back and forth in prayer. His right hand remained fixed on his trimmed beard.

Sy opened to the frayed, maroon bookmark. “My eyes gaze to the heavens, from where will my help come?” he responded.

They continued this religious volley, the rabbi singing praises, Sy providing a tepid translation. By the end, Sy assumed a shuckling stance as his body, too, swayed to the rhythm of the prayer.

Without warning Rabbi Kagan grasped the collar of Sy’s pinstriped irregular shirt, made a tiny cut with pocket scissors, and tore the material. Sy could have chosen a black ribbon for the *kriyah* ceremony, but he opted for the Orthodox custom of tearing one’s garment.

“You are now considered a mourner,” Rabbi Kagan said.

“A mourner.” He looked at the rabbi. “For how long?”

“Until sundown after the burial.”

Sy turned a page on the prayer book. “Blessed are you, Our God, the true Judge.”

Attached to a chain dangled a chipped washing cup. Sy poured water first on his right hand, and then on his left as Rabbi Kagan had done. The cold water felt good on his hands.

“Have a safe flight,” Rabbi Kagan said. “Your mother will be at rest in Jerusalem, waiting for the Messiah.”

Maybe I should have told him I wasn’t at my mother’s funeral, Sy thought, vaguely aware of Elaine in the front seat of the taxi reading Good Housekeeping. If he knew, maybe he would’ve made a speech or had a *minyán*.

Slowly, Sy and Elaine navigated off the plane and stood with other families awaiting cargo. It was ten in the morning. Sy noticed that two men and a woman with a blue beret had torn clothing as well. Sy assumed they were waiting for bodies, freshly dead. He felt unworthy of their sympathetic glances and looked away. After the security officers signed off on the documents from Riverwood, a fully bearded man with a large black yarmulke placed the metal shipping container on a dolly labeled *Chevra Kadisha*.

Sy spotted Avi holding a sign, Esterson, written on flimsy yellow paper. His first cousin from his mother’s side looked much older than he remembered.

“Avi!” Elaine motioned.

The men approached each other. Avi took Sy’s hand and shook enthusiastically.

“Welcome, welcome. How was your trip?” Avi asked.

“Tiring.” Sy answered. “We’re ready to go”.

He climbed the uneven Jerusalem stone walkway of Har Shalom cemetery. Elaine lagged behind. He consulted his map of the cemetery. The diagram resembled a semi-circular tiered wedding cake. He crossed off the name of each family plot they reached – Rabinovitz. Hillblum, Friedman. According to the map they were close but the midday *chamsin* forced him to stop.

“I don’t remember the heat being so oppressive.” Sy drank from his plastic canteen.

“This *chamsin*, it’s the worst heat we’ve had.” Avi wiped against his matted brown curly hair with his hand.

They had gone up an extra row and backtracked to find the plot.

“Sy, where are you? Always rushing ahead!” Elaine’s voice echoed through the cemetery. He looked down and saw her flowered sunhat two rows down. “Go up one tier and make a right. You should be near Friedman.”

“Please come down and help me; you know how I get mixed up.”

“I also got a little lost. Just relax and follow my voice.” Sy impatiently brushed his hands against his pants.

Members of the *Chevra Kadisha* were waiting by the freshly dug earth. Elaine had caught up and was fanning her hat against her neck. Sy saw his mother’s remains wrapped in white cloth with the royal blue *Magen David*. The stone, a modest slab of white marble, was ready to be set. He brailed the name carved on the stone: *Hadas Bat Sorah*. Elaine patted Sy’s neck.

Avi grabbed the shovel and scooped dirt from the prepared mound. Sy was startled as the dirt hit the remains. Two workers chewed gum as they finished shoveling.

“She had a hard life,” Avi remarked. “Never recovered from the pogroms.”

“She had a sad life.” Sy heard the piercing wail of mourners at a burial several tiers down. Several dark-skinned women beat their chests in unison.

“Sephardic Jews,” Avi said. “A lot of crying. Years ago, they paid people to cry at funerals. Now there’s a job.”

Sy stared at them. Paid mourners. The mercenary aspect of mourning made him recoil yet he wondered if he should pay them to cry. Somebody should, he thought. He sighed loudly and waited for a feeling of closure, perhaps relief, as they exited the cemetery. It did not come.

Elaine made reservations at an upscale restaurant in the Jewish quarter for that evening. “Remember,” she said. “According to that rabbi, the mourning is over at sunset. It’s time to enjoy.” Sy shielded his gaze from the sun’s glare. At least five more hours to mourn, by his reckoning.

Elaine scouted the new shopping mall in the lobby. A lady drinking coffee stood up and motioned to Elaine and Sy. “Please, may I help you? Special discount.” Her tongue was sluggish, thickened by her Russian accent. She motioned to a sign, *Free manicure with haircut*. “No thanks, maybe tomorrow,” Elaine replied. “Poor thing,” she continued as they walked to their room. “Tourism is so slow these days.”

Sy fell into a jetlagged sleep. He slept on his back, immobile, a tribute to the narrow cot on which he’d slept as a child. He dreamt he was at the cemetery with Rabbi Kagan. He was retrieving the bones from the casket and connecting them, two at a time, with rusted metal links. The skeleton stood upright and his mother dangled like a marionette suspended in the air. Sy tried to touch it but his feet wouldn’t move. His body stretched as he tried to reach her. Finally he touched the bones of her hand with his index finger. At that instant, the bones disintegrated to white powder, and all proof of her disappeared. He screamed, his fingers still indenting the sheets when he awoke.

“Gone shopping. Don’t forget your jetlag pills”, the note from Elaine said. Sy put on a light blue shirt and navy slacks that Elaine had safety pinned together so he wouldn’t make an incorrect match. Groggy from his anguished mid-afternoon sleep, Sy stayed in the hotel, his headset on. The arched windows in the lobby let in the last light of the day. He passed the beauty salon, and the woman from yesterday smiled, revealing a wide gap between her two front teeth. Sy approached her and noticed her nametag, “Masha”. A small gold flower was clipped onto the tag. He decided to treat himself to a manicure.

“Yes, I have time for manicure,” she said. “No haircut?”

He shook his head, oddly offended by the idea.

Masha perched on her stool and appeared to squat in her largeness. The small daisies on her black Lycra dress distorted with each of her movements. She placed green tinted glasses on her full nose and examined his nails. They were dry and brittle, the skin canvassed with age spots. “You hard working man,” she declared. A gold tooth flashed as she spoke.

“Actually, I am retired.”

“No matter,” she shook her head. “I can tell things.”

His eyes closed and he nodded off as his fingers soaked in the water. When he woke, his hands were enveloped in hers. He suddenly remembered – the rabbi had said that a mourner didn’t cut his hair or nails. Well, it was almost sundown. This would have to do.

Masha propped her elbows on the table as she continued to knead his hands. “Feel good, yes?”

“Yes”. He was more relaxed than he had been in weeks.

“My son,” Masha gestured to the picture by the nail polish display. The black-haired youth in the bronze frame resembled his mother.

“Good looking fellow,” Sy answered. “How old is he?”

“Seventeen. Not like other stewpid boyz; he is hard worker.”

Sy closed his eyes. The hair and nails of the corpse keep growing after death, he couldn’t help but think. Maybe the rabbis were onto something: the Jewish genius for grief and mourning.

Masha sighed and massaged with deep circular motions of her thumbs, her gold bracelets clinking like champagne glasses.

But what was the grief? What corpse? It was an ossuary, a bag of bones. But she’d scarcely been more than that in his life.

“Relax,” Masha said.

He couldn’t ever remember having his hands touched, soothed like this. The manicure was almost over. A deep sadness overwhelmed him. Who was he mourning – her or himself? He was also no more than a bag of bones.

“Meester, you enjoying?”

He made a choking noise as he tried to answer.

Masha half-rose, alarmed. “You okay meester?”

“It’s wonderful. What magical hands.” He stopped. He couldn’t talk

“Can I get you glass of water?”

“You’re a *tzadeikes*, a *tzadeikes*,” he said brokenly. He placed his head on the unsteady table and sobbed as the sun went into the ground.

FRANK SINATRA, SAVIOR OF THE JEWS

Ron Pies

You can croon all you want about the 50's, but mostly you'd be singing through your *tuchas*. For all the gray-flannel comfort you might take in those days—in the Tupperware parties, the batting blasts of Mickey Mantle, and the smiling, grandfatherly figure of Ike—you'd also have to sing about Joe McCarthy, segregated restrooms, and the Rosenbergs getting the chair. But by 1962, things were looking up. Jack Kennedy was ruling in Camelot and Cadillacs had perfect fins. Notwithstanding the Bay of Pigs disaster, the country seemed to be gaining confidence. Even in my home town of Richfield, New York—an enclave of about 18,000 mostly blue-collar Italians and Poles—we could feel the sunshine of change on our faces. My father's furniture business was booming, my mother had just taken a new administrative job at our synagogue, and my brother Morrie was about to head off to Cornell. Even my younger sister, Lori, seemed to be settling in, after a period of nasty confrontations with my father, who had refused to let her have a dog. I was twelve years old, asthmatic, and insufferably bookish, but I was happy. I had managed to find a group of equally insufferable, bookish kids to hang around with, and—though I had yet to be bar mitzvahed—I was already eyeing college and medical school. I would never have believed, in the summer of that sparkling year, that my family would soon face the most exquisite humiliation—much less that Frank Sinatra would wind up saving our Jewish heinies.

Of course, there was anti-semitism in Richfield, and I saw my share of it at Richfield High. It came mostly from the young scions of the town's upper-crust, who regularly egged the Jewish kids' lockers, or left ominous notes in our lunch boxes. (My friend Howie Gelber was thus informed, "90% of Jewish kids go to college. The rest die horrible deaths in the locker room. Be careful, yid."). The Italian and Polish kids were greatly feared, but their attitude toward the five Jewish kids in school was one of amused, Olympian indifference: since they could kick the crap out of us with such surpassing ease, harassment was hardly worth their time.

There was, in fact, a peculiar affinity between the Jews and the Italians in our town. My father used to joke, "The Italians are one of the 12 Lost Tribes," and, "The Jews and the Italians—smothered in the same pot!" I suppose he meant that both our tribes struggled in the thick minestrone of food, family, and feelings. My father was actually good friends with Anthony Marchese, the owner of "Tony's Roman Room"—the premier Italian restaurant in Genesee County. Legend had it that Tony had built the main rotunda of the restaurant from imported Italian marble, using workmen flown in from his ancestral village in Sicily. Like Tony himself, the Roman Room was big, showy, and preposterous. Here, in tiny Richfield—home to the annual "Onion Queen Festival" and Richfield Turf Farms—you could surround yourself in an Ionic colonnade and grow fat on manicotti, serenaded by three Italian tenors in dinner jackets. Carved in Roman-looking letters on the entablature of the colonnade was Tony's motto: "It's always a beautiful day!"

All this was before the fiasco that befell my father, and which bound him to Tony Marchese in ways my family did not understand. In late November of 1962—a year before they scraped Kennedy off the seat of that big Lincoln Continental—my father's business nearly went down the toilet. Although he was good at selling furniture, Jacob Pinsky was naïve about the world of high-finance. He got involved (as my brother, the future lawyer, explained it to me) in some kind of Ponzi scheme, wherein "a fraudulent multi-level marketing program" led to my father's losing over \$150,000. He did his best to keep all this from the family, but his blanched, lip-biting expression every evening at dinner told the story. Then, one night—as if a demon had slipped suddenly out of his twisted mouth—my father looked relaxed and radiant. "How would you kids like to go to "The North Pole" this weekend?" he asked, beaming, knowing full-well our reaction. (This was a sort of amusement park-cum-Christmas village, just north of Richfield, and the only concession granted the Pinsky kids, by way of acknowledging the arch-goyische holiday).

None of us understood the nature of my father's abrupt transformation—though my mother's mirthless smiles told me that she knew something was up. But before we could analyze the

situation, my family found itself caught up in a new drama: my father was suddenly charged with bringing Frank Sinatra to Tony's Roman Room. Now, you need to understand: my father was a devoted fan of Sinatra his entire life. As a teenager, I would hear him crooning "Strangers in the Night" "in the car, in the shower, and anywhere else he could get away with it. (Actually, my father had quite a decent singing voice, and had even sung once in our Temple's production of "Fiddler."). But fan or not, it was hard to figure why my father would put himself in the precarious position of trying to recruit "The Chairman of the Board"—as Sinatra was known in the early 60s, just after he started his own recording label, Reprise Records.

I say "precarious" for several reasons. First, there were the perennial rumors linking Sinatra with organized crime. "He's mobbed up, for godssake!" Herb Feigl had complained to my father, just after Friday night services at Temple Shalom. "Why the hell are you getting mixed up with this *groisser gornisht*, Jake?

"Don't tell me Sinatra is a good-for-nothing!" my father replied heatedly. "First of all, Feigl, nobody has ever proven that the man is mobbed up. Second of all, did you know that Frank Sinatra has spoken out against anti-semitism? Did you know that he's got a valet named Jacobs, a Jew and a Negro, no less? And Sinatra flies this man Jacobs to Israel and has him *bar mitzvahed!*" The mob issue aside—and notwithstanding my father's robust defense of Sinatra—there were other risks involved. My father's devotion to this *groisser gornisht goy* began to generate a peculiar backlash among some of the congregants of Temple Shalom. Five or six of the older men—and Herb Feigl was clearly the ring-leader—began to speak disparagingly of my father. Coming out of services one Friday night, I overheard Feigl murmuring something to Izzy Cohen about "Jake Pinsky...Roman Room...damn *toches lecker...*" Since my Yiddish was not very polished, I asked Morrie, later that night, to translate for me. He shook his head from side to side, and whistled derisively through his teeth. "That's basically "ass-kisser", kid," he said. "They think Dad's an Uncle Tom for sucking up to Tony Marchese and Frank Sinatra." I didn't yet know the precise literary reference, but I knew that my father was the object of ridicule, and that my face was flushed with vicarious humiliation.

It turned out my father was right: George Jacobs was Sinatra's valet for about fifteen years, between 1953 and 1968. My father was also right about Jacobs' lineage: a black man born in New Orleans, who apparently had come to Judaism late in life. It seemed obvious enough to my father that the road to snagging Sinatra led through George Jacobs. There followed, inevitably, a flurry of letters and phone calls between my father and Jacobs, all in the period of a few weeks in late November. All over our house, I saw scribbled notes in my mother's hand, indicating, "George called...urgent!" or "Call back George re: time of performance." Jacobs had sent my father a glossy, autographed photo of Frank Sinatra, his arm draped around the smiling valet. Not to be outdone, my father sent George a picture of a smiling Jake Pinsky, photographed next to Rocky Marciano—a trophy from the days when my father used to hang out at Kushner's Hotel in the Catskills, schmoozing with the pro boxers. There were also calls back and forth between my father and Tony Marchese. During these conversations, my father's brow would furrow into a sort of "M" configuration, and his voice would become tight and irritable. He had a bad habit of chewing his lip when he was under pressure, and I could see him biting down hard with every call from Marchese—who, evidently, was not having a "beautiful day."

Astoundingly, by early December, everything seemed to be coming together. "This George Jacobs is a mensch," my father announced one evening at supper, slapping his hand down on the dinner table. "He's done it! Arranged everything. Old Blue Eyes is coming to Tony's Roman Room in two weeks." Now, you can say what you want about Richfield, New York—hick-town, Podunk, glorified turf farm—but an appearance by Frank Sinatra was a big deal. The Italian community was understandably elated. Purple mimeographs went up all over town, especially on the bulletin boards of St. Joseph's Church, Capiolla's delicatessen, Biondi's Bakery, and the numerous Italian social clubs throughout our little town. The Jews, as you might expect, were decidedly cool about the whole deal. While

Sinatra definitely had his fans among our people, the whole affair had a fishy smell to it, so far as our congregation was concerned. When Herb Feigl and his cronies passed my father and me in the hallway of the synagogue, their faces bore the self-satisfied smirks of people who “knew something.” The night of December 17th arrived in a nasty mix of lake-effect snow and freezing rain. My father was decked out in a formal dinner jacket, while my brother and I wore our best suits. My sister and mother had gotten “look-alike” permanents at Betty’s Beauty Shoppe, despite my sister’s protestations. Even with the bad weather, the Roman Room was filled to capacity, which meant, in those benighted years, a choking haze of smoke that burned my eyes and stunk up my clothes. A lobster-faced Tony Marchese sauntered over to our table and, with a rush of whiskey-breath, crooned into our faces, “It’s a beautiful day!” My father sat perfectly still, folding his mouth into a tight smile.

The opening act was a local boy, Joey Battaglia, who was only a few years older than my brother. Joey had been in “County Chorus” during his years at Richfield High, and often sang at variety shows put on by St. Theresa’s Church. As we feasted on veal parmigiana, tortellini, lasagna, and meatballs, “Joey B.” went through a medley of Italian favorites, ending with a schmaltzy piece Morrie immediately identified as “Nessum Dorma.”

Then the waiting began. The crowd was pretty well liquored, and that undoubtedly held them through the first half-hour or so. Tony himself took the mike, and tried his hand at a few Italian jokes, most of which bombed. It was 8:45—Sinatra had been expected to take the stage at 8:00. I could see my father’s scrunched up smile slowly metamorphosing into a grim-looking slit. Tony Marchese came by our table, but this time, there was no “beautiful day” malarkey. Instead, he whispered something into my father’s ear that instantly drew the life force from his face. My father flagged down the waiter and ordered a martini, finishing it almost as soon as it arrived. Beads of sweat had started to form above his upper lip, which he had compressed between his upper and lower incisors. Then the comments began—murmurs, at first, then rumblings. It was hard to tell whether they were directed at anyone in particular, or were merely the generalized ruminations of a peevish and disappointed crowd. But as these jibes became more clearly audible to me and my family, I could feel a creeping tingle on the back of my neck. “Can you believe this crap?”

“Well, what did you expect? You know who was handling...”

“Yeah, well, ask a *iarrusu* Jew to deliver Sinatra, and...”

“I hear this Pinsky was hard up...made some sort of deal...” “I paid forty freakin’ bucks for tickets to this...” “Hey, you know why Jews have big noses? Because the air is free!” “Sinatra at the Roman Room, *stu cazzo!* From the group sitting next to us, we heard the first insult directed specifically at my father. “Hey, Pinsky!” a portly man with thick, black horn-rim glasses shouted, “*Aricchi Du Porcu!*” This was followed by gales of laughter from the surrounding tables. Even Morrie, who prided himself on his linguistic skills, just shrugged his shoulders at these Sicilian expletives, but there was no mistaking their tone. Soon the rumblings escalated into that cliché of protest you see in prison movies: the patrons began banging their silverware on the table.

“Jake,” my mother said in a quavering voice, “I don’t want the kids here for this. Let’s go.” My father said nothing, but immediately nodded to us in affirmation. As we shuffled out of the dining room to hoots and catcalls, Tony Marchese suddenly blocked my father’s way. “Pinsky, you little *piseddu!*” he hissed, only inches from my father’s face, “I loan you fifty grand to save your goddamn furniture store, and this is what you do to me? I’m ruined! Who the hell did you deal with, anyway?” My father could barely expel enough air to speak, but managed the words, “George Jacobs. I had it all arranged with Jacobs.” Marchese snorted. “You arrange a gig with that colored shoe-shine boy Sinatra keeps around? Whaddya you, *stunata?* Get the hell out of here!” By this time, my mother had hustled my brother, my sister and me into the marble foyer that led to the main exit. My father quickly caught up with us, grabbed our coats without bothering to tip the irritated young lady in the coat-check room, and led us out into the freezing night. The parking lot was covered with a treacherous glaze of ice, and our car already had an inch of heavy, wet snow on it. As my father shooed us all in, scraping frantically at the windshield, a noisy throng began to mill around us. Again, the taunts and insults flew. “Hey, Pinsky, you couldn’t organize a belch

at a spaghetti supper!” “Pinsky, you run a show about as good as you run that furniture store!” The first snowball hit my sister’s window and disintegrated harmlessly. The second projectile—evidently, wet snow packed around a large rock—shattered the rear window on the driver’s side of our car, and nearly struck my brother in the head. Thankfully, he had bent to tie his shoe just as glass fragments exploded above him.

I guess I always pictured Frank Sinatra in a red Cadillac Coupe de Ville—maybe a “stretch” version of the 1960 model, which still had those huge, swept-back tailfins. So in the midst of all this chaos, I hardly noticed the rather subdued, black Imperial sedan that was gingerly inching its way into the crowd, its entry punctuated by short, sharp horn blasts. As the sedan approached our car, the driver’s window hummed down slowly, and a distinguished-looking black man gazed out at the melee. “What in the name of ...Jake? Jake Pinsky! Is that you, brother?” The voice was a rich baritone, imbued with the twang of rural Louisiana.

My father was so stunned, he did not register that the man he had corresponded with so assiduously over the past month—George Jacobs—was only about five feet away from him, smiling broadly; and that Jacobs’ boss, Old Blue Eyes, was nearly as close. By now, the ugly-minded crowd outside Tony’s Roman Room had not only calmed down—it had nearly fallen silent.

The back window of the big Imperial rolled down, and a thin, rather haggard-looking figure leaned his head out. The voice was New Jersey honey, with a whiskey chaser. “Plane got caught in the goddamn snowstorm, folks. Hey, pal—if you’re Jake, you did a good job. Say hi to Tony, will ya? And tell him I’m sorry—got a big bash in New York in three hours. Let’s get outta here, George.” Jacobs frowned at this, and I thought I detected a look of embarrassment on his weathered face, as he glanced over at my father. The Imperial’s windows rolled up, and the big sedan eased its way out of the parking lot.

As the crowd dispersed, there followed a few murmurs of “Sorry, Jake,” and “It wasn’t your fault,” and “Hey, you heard Sinatra, leave Pinsky alone.” My father—whose face had looked like a blanched grape a few minutes earlier—now wore the beatific expression of a man who had just been blessed by the God of his Fathers.

As we drove home, my brother—who liked to put things in a historical context—turned to me and said, “Francis Albert Sinatra, Savior of the Jews.”

SIN CITY

Elyakim Deutsch

I am a swell dancer. I really am. Ask anyone. I don't say that to show off or get respect or anything like that. In fact, I don't really say that at all, outside of right now to let you know about it, because I want you to understand where I'm coming from. And I don't mean any specific type of dancing. Just that I can naturally move to the beat and I'm a big fan of doing so whenever I have the opportunity to let loose and get funky, as they say. Alas, this opportunity arises less often than you might assume. For I am a religious fellow - Modern Orthodox Jew, to be precise - and my upbringing as such prohibits physical contact with the female gender. Can you imagine? I'm sure you can't. Anyway, this greatly limits my ability to get "stupid-fly" on the dance floor in any local clubs or other co-educational establishments. It's a real shame too, because I just know I'd be so good. Now, I normally wouldn't get so gabby about dancing, but last winter break a few friends and I decided to go to Las Vegas for vacation, and there was quite a bit of letting loose to be had. And that's the story I'd like to tell you.

Well, the truth is I must have predicted the looseness of the trip a bit. I suppose I had a feeling about it before we left - our destination was called "Sin City" after all. So when I went shopping with my Mom - yes, with my Mom, she's a good shopper! - about a week prior to my embarkation, I insisted we purchase a black silken shirt and grey fedora for yours truly. When she would inquire as per my particularly flashy requests, I simply responded, "Vegas outfit," and surprisingly enough, this seemed to satisfy her line of questioning. I guess she decided to go all Don't Ask Don't Tell on me. I didn't mind.

Anyhoo, before we knew it, we were off to Las Vegas, Nevada - me, Josh, Danny, and Moe. The fearsome foursome headed for the City of Lights and all that grand stuff. We had been sincerely looking forward to those few days in fantasyland, and let me tell you, we had quite a time. We stayed in the luxurious Luxor Hotel - a big black glass pyramid with an Egyptian-themed casino. And to get to your room you had to take these elevators they called "inclinator" that went at a 39-degree angle along the diagonal of the pyramid. Imagine taking one of those babies up fifteen floors when you're stone-drunk! It's quite a ride. Well, I see I'm losing track already. I want to tell you about the end of the trip. So, suffice it to say, we had been having a flat-out blast in that crazy place. We encountered lots of boozing and not much snoozing, as you can imagine. There was gambling, smoking of cigars, vomiting on hotel beds, and other nutty hijinks. It was quite a trip indeed, yet still I imagine it was on the lame side of the equator as far as Vegas vacations go. So we wanted to make our last night a doozy. We decided to hit the hot spots where all the trendy young people go, and I even broke out the aforementioned "Vegas outfit" in all its glory. Our flight would be very early the next day so we figured we'd just stay up all night and get to the airport in the wee hours of the morning, where we'd wait for a real sleepy flight back to reality.

We started out the night by taking a cab to the Palms Hotel where we played some slots and hit the bar. Now, I don't know why this is, but all my friends seem to get snowed really easily despite their hefty figures. For me, it takes quite a lot of alcohol till I truly start to feel it. But, let me tell you, Moe was a total goner by the time we decided to blow that Popsicle stand and head for the Hard Rock Hotel, where we thought we might check out their dance club as a final bang to the trip. On the walk over, these guys on the street were trying to hand out little cards advertising prostitutes, but Moe was bold enough to inform each one of them that if he was in need of sexual intercourse, he would be sure to phone their respective mothers. The last fellow he told that to was not as amused as one might hope and popped Moe square in the nose. We rushed him away as fast as we could, and when we reached the Hard Rock, Danny got on the cab line to escort him to the Luxor for the night. Danny didn't mind - he said he wasn't so into

dancing anyway, and you can use as much sleep as you can get after a vacation like this. While we were waiting outside for the cab, a bachelorette party must have let out inside the casino, because lots of exciting young ladies wearing white veils piled out of there, giggling and screaming. This one blonde gal in the group was wearing a T-shirt that said “suck-for-a-buck” on it, and had lots of Lifesaver candies attached. I asked her if she was the one getting married and she said no, her friend was. Then she asked me what convention I was in town for – there were two going on that week: One called BondCon, in honor of bondage, and one called some series of initials, on behalf of electronics. I told her we were there for both, and that I had just presented a paper on The Use of Duct Tape and Handheld Electronic Devices in Bondage Today. I was lying, of course. She said she thought I was really funny and then grabbed my arm and laughed. Then she called me handsome. Danny made sure to get a picture real quick with his cool digital camera, and I have that pic on my computer to this day. I still look at it sometimes to remind myself that that whole crazy night really happened. And I don’t have many pictures of girls grabbing my arm, of course!

Well, soon the bridesmaids all scurried off and the cab took Danny and Moe away. So Josh and I decided to go have some fun. We still had a couple of hours to kill so we had a few drinks and then checked out the club. The entrance to the club was on the casino floor and there was even a line to get in and a red velvet rope and everything! After a bit, we got inside and boy was it a noisy, happening place. The music was blaring and the lasers were flashing and there was a huge sea of people shaking their tail-feathers on the dance floor. On the far side of the room was the bar, which had a really neat light that would shine up from the bottom through the glass. This place was one classy joint. We were scoping out the scene from the bar for a while and it was really interesting to see how the patrons of this fine establishment behaved themselves. I felt like I was watching one of those nature shows. A lot of the dancing crowd was already co-ed, but it seemed that around the edges there were lots of girls dancing with each other, waiting for Mr. Right to come along, I guess, because they were always looking around them at other people. Now, the guys who did not yet have dancing partners – they couldn’t dance with their man friends because somehow that kind of behavior is frowned upon by society. So the guys were spread around the perimeter, holding onto their drinks and bobbing their heads to the music, hoping to lock eyes with a lovely lady, whom they could then court on the dance floor.

The music was starting to get inside me and I was feeling an intense need to dance, so Josh and I decided to split up and try out the dance floor for a bit in order to make a thorough attempt at getting jiggy. I edged my way onto the dance floor and started to really enjoy myself as I joined the hundreds of young people in experiencing the music in a physical fashion.

Soon I noticed a couple of young ladies, probably a few years older than my own ripe age of 21, who were dancing together. They were watching me for a bit but I pretended not to notice too much. Then they smiled at me and I smiled back. I wished that I had had more to drink so I could be bold like Moe, or just not care and be one cool cucumber, but I still felt too aware of everything that was going on. Luckily the music was so loud that I could hardly form a cogent thought, let alone engage in civil banter. Still one girl, probably the less attractive one, made her way over to my dancing area. I was feeling a tad anxious, but still flattered for the attention I was getting while I danced the night away. “I like your hat!” she yelled.

“What?!” I yelled back.

Then she repeated what she said, but this time in all capital letters: “I LIKE YOUR HAT!”

“Oh, thanks!” I screamed, inaudibly.

Now, I know I hadn’t really ever been to a dance club before, but someone should probably tell you when you come in that “I like your hat” is also code for “May I have this dance” and that apparently “Oh, thanks” is “Yes, I’d like that” – because before you could say “Hard Rock Hotel,” she was all over me like cheese on crackers. Like in that commercial, where the cheese and crackers dance, you know? She was less than an inch away from me, thrusting and gyrating and

altogether having a fun time. Also, she apparently assumed that our friendship had progressed to the point where she no longer needed to respect my personal space, as she danced with one of her legs thrust between my own in a manner such that every time I moved apace to the music, I found myself sitting on and/or rubbing against her calf over and over again. Well, she seemed to be enjoying herself, and her friend in the background was also looking on approvingly, but I'm not so sure I was up for it. Nevertheless, I told myself to "just let your inner dancing man take over" and not think too hard about anything, and hoped somehow it would all work out. Soon after I had sat on her leg a few times, she decided we should get to know each other better. She asked me what my name was and I told her, "It's Adam."

"WHAT?!"

"IT'S ADAM!" I yelled excessively. "WHAT'S YOURS!"

She yelled something I couldn't hear at all, and I asked "WHAT" and she repeated it twice as loud and I still to this day have no clue what she said, but asking her a third time didn't seem appropriate.

Then she leaned in with a smile and said into my ear, "I know this is gonna sound gay, but can I have a kiss?"

Now I wasn't about to give her a lesson on the real meaning of homosexuality or anything, so I considered her request. Truthfully, I didn't feel we were quite so close as to be kissing friends yet, despite the whole interlocking legs thing. After all, I had never kissed a girl before and I didn't even know this one's name! But her request sounded so sincere that I thought it would be wrong to deny her even a peck on the cheek. So I leaned in toward her, when out of left field she grabbed my whole face and stuck her tongue into my mouth without warning. Whoa, Nelly! It was pretty sudden. I guess she had disagreed with my assessment of our relationship. And while I'm sure many different thoughts and feelings would soon be speeding to my brain, at first all I thought of was how wet and slippery her tongue was as it moved around on mine. Like an eel in a bathtub. When she finally removed her mouth from mine and took a step back, I must have realized that this was a bit too much for my system at the moment, because I naturally made a beeline for the bar. Precisely as I arrived, panting in disbelief, so did my good friend Josh, in precisely the same manner! "I think a transvestite just licked my ear!" he exclaimed in horror.

I must say, I was a bit relieved to hear that I was not the only one to be face-raped on the dance floor. But, you know what would make me feel even more relieved, I thought to myself. "Two scotches, post-haste!" my mouth answered, in the general direction of the bartender.

We imbibed our drinks and decided we'd stay a bit longer. But then we'd have to catch a cab back to our hotel to gather the rest of our party and leave this kooky place. In order to play it safe, we went to dance on the opposite side of the dance floor from where we began our respective jiggy-getting, and I found myself avoiding eye contact with everyone. I just wanted to dance for a while in a loud, musical room full of dancing people and let go completely, because I didn't know when I'd get this chance again. So I put my body on autopilot and danced and danced, as my mind floated for a while.

Soon I found myself thinking about that kiss I had on the other side of the room and how it was so random and so permanent. When people talk about their first kiss, it's usually a big thing. It's like part of the history of that person. But with me, it was such a stupid nothing. I wondered if that lady would even remember me in five minutes and then I realized I had already forgotten what she looked like myself. Now, I'm as laid-back as the next guy as far as things that don't go according to plan on a day-to-day basis, but when something annoying happens that's irreversible, well that really gets my goat. I wondered if maybe I was getting punished from the Guy Upstairs for putting myself in such an inter-gender situation and all – maybe I deserved this ugly tattoo of a memory to be with me forever.

I must have been dancing blankly for longer than I thought because when I snapped out of it,

Josh was nowhere to be seen and my watch said it was time to skedaddle. I went to the exit and on my way out of the club I noticed that there were a number of pretty young women checking their makeup in the mirrors of the hallway. I wondered why there were these mirrors and sinks in the hallway and then turned my head and saw stalls. Only then did my slow and apparently more-sloshed-than-I-thought brain put two and two together: I was somehow in the Ladies Restroom. Right as I noticed, I heard a voice yell, "Oh my God, there's a *guy* in here!"

Well, I don't have to tell you that I jetted out of there like a rocket on steroids. I ran fullspeed and spotted the real exit sign and zipped out, never looking back. I jumped over the velvet ropes and sped through the flashing lights and ding-ding-dings of the slot machines as I made my way through the now-spinning casino to the front doors. I was sure there must be at least a few large, bald, angry men in black suits right behind me at this point, just a few steps away from causing serious damage. I finally made it out the casino doors and outside, when I noticed how long the taxi line was. I was about to throw in the towel when I spied, out of the corner of my eye, my old friend Josh, bless his heart, getting into a cab. I jumped in head first, yelling, "GO! GO!" in desperation. "Wow," Josh remarked calmly as we pulled away, "What the hell happened to you?"

I was gasping for breath so all I could cough out was the word "Ladies..."

Josh laughed and sat back in his seat. As I caught my breath in a less comfortable position, I looked out the window at the lights of the city as we passed them by for the last time. I thought about the whole trip and how soon it would be like a dream and then a fading memory. But what I thought about most was how, whenever people would ask me "Where was your first kiss," I would be haunted by the answer I would never tell them: It was in Sin City, inside the mouth of a girl with no face and no name, who must have really liked my hat.

Aaron Roller

Born in the 1890's, Aaron Roller spent his early years under the tutelage of the Alter of Slabodka. As a young scholar, he went on to lead the Yeshiva of Slutzk until the situation in Europe became unbearable. After escaping the Nazis, he arrived in America and went on to found Beis Medrash Gavoha in Lakewood, New Jersey. This is his first piece of fiction for Mima'amakim.

Adam Eliyahu Berkowitz

I was a chef at exclusive French restaurants in Manhattan, part-time biker, played blues guitar on the seven line, a dairy farmer on a kibbutz, a combat medic in Tzahal, and taught in Yeshiva in Israel. I have been blessed with an amazing wife, daughter, and son. I live in Bat Ayin, Gush Etzion, and spend my days trying to figure out which mud puddles God wants me to walk through and which he wants me to walk around.

Adam Shechter

Adam Shechter received his BA in English from Hunter College, and has studied at the Mid-Manhattan Institute for Psychoanalysis. He has been writing for many years and recently has begun to publish and publicly perform his work.

Alieza Salzberg

Alieza Salzberg enjoys the life of a student. She is pursuing an M.A. in Creative Writing at City College. Next year she will be studying Talmud at Matan and sitting in coffee shops on Emek Refaim, writing, at night. She lives in Jerusalem with her husband Aharon Horwitz.

Avi Gerver

Avi lives in Manhattan and works as a freelance photographer and graphic/web designer. Avi received his BFA with honors in Photography and Imaging from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. In 2003, he was given the Seth Tobias award for his landscape photographs of Israel.

Avi Steinberg

Avi recently graduated Yeshiva University as an English major and would love to unite his two interests, writing and drawing, to become a syndicated cartoonist. If that doesn't work, he doesn't know what he will do, but it better pay well.

Chaim Strauchler

Chaim Strauchler is a community rabbi in Westport, CT. He looks forward to energizing Jewish communal life with the passion and creative force behind his poetry. He hopes to renew within Mima'amakim the joy of the spiritual quest, as he once again assumes the role of editor-in-chief along with Jake Marmer, next year.

Channah Magori

Channah Magori is an American born poet living in Jerusalem, Israel since 1973. She works for the International Coalition for Missing Israeli Soldiers. She has recently completed her Master's Degree at Bar Ilan University in the new Creative Writing Program- Writing Text/ Jewish Context and has completed her first manuscript of poetry as Master's thesis. Her work has appeared in Poetica, Works in Progress, and The B'nai Brith Magazine. She is currently working on a manuscript of second-generation Holocaust poetry, a manuscript of Love Songs and her first novel.

Chari Pere

Chari Pere is a twenty-year old Cartooning major at the School of Visual Arts. Among her biggest artistic and comedic inspirations include Bill Watterson, Matt Groening, Frederick Opper, and Seth MacFarlane. Her ultimate goals are to have a syndicated comic strip, to write and illustrate children's books, and to design greeting cards and T-shirts.

David Druce

David Druce has been a contributor to Mima'amakim for five years.

Dena Weiss

Dena just graduated from NYU, got a BA in Religion. She gained her reputation for Talmud by reciting the entire Mah Nishtanah. By heart. She benefitted a whole lot from being the editor-in-chief of this year's Mima'amakim... *especially* monetarily. She thanks all of the editors and contributors for their patience and super work. And of course, she would like to thank Jesus.

Elyakim Deutsch

Elyakim Deutsch has auburn hair and gets a profound satisfaction out of hearing his name mispronounced, so please do so. Typically enough, he is leaving his post as a math teacher to pursue a screenwriting career. Elyakim wishes that everyone in the world would hug each other, so that he could quietly steal their wallets.

Emmanuel Moses

Emmanuel Moses was born in Casablanca, Morocco in 1959. He grew up in Cachan and Paris. In 1969, his family moved to Jerusalem. Since 1986, he lives and works in Paris. Poet, novelist, translator, Emmanuel Moses has published 12 books and translated poetry from English (C.K. Williams, Raymond Carver), Hebrew (Amichai, Carmi, Pagis, and others) and German (Peter Huchel). He directed two anthologies of Hebrew verse (Obsidiane; Gallimard). Two of his novels have been translated into German and a selection of his poetry, "Last News from Mr. Nobody" (translated by Marilyn Hacker, C.K. Williams and Kevin Hart among others), has been published in the US (Hansel/Other Press, January 2005). Among his awards are the Nelly-Sachs Prize for translation and the Max-Jacob Prize for poetry.

Haya Pomrenze

Haya Pomrenze's work has been published or is forthcoming in the anthology Irrepressible Appetites, the Miami Herald, Pearl, Zeek and Saints of Hysteria: A Half Century of Collaborative American Poetry. Haya's fiction is based on her experience as a recovering A.C.M.E, an adult child of a meshuganeh environment.

JJ Gross

JJ Gross is a creative director and partner in Blowdart, Inc. an advertising agency. His children's book "Izzy Hagbah" is scheduled to be published by Pitsoppany Press in Jerusalem this coming Autumn.

Janet Kirchheimer

Janet R. Kirchheimer's poetry has appeared most recently in Potomac Review, Lilith, PoetryNZ, Kerem, and Voices Israel. Work is forthcoming in Main Street Rag and Jewish Women's Literary Annual. She was a finalist in the 2004 Small Poetry Press Chapbook Contest. She teaches teens and adults about Judaism using creative writing.

Jay Michaelson

Jay Michaelson (www.metatronics.net) is the chief editor of Zeek: A Jewish Journal of Thought and Culture (www.zeek.net), a teacher of Kabbalah and spirituality, and the director of Nehirim: A Spiritual Initiative for GLBT Jews. A finalist for the 2003 Koret Young Writer on Jewish Themes Award, Jay is a regular contributor to the Forward. Recent work includes The Inflected Letters: Stories of Faith and Desire and "Da'at," published in Mentsh: On Being Jewish and Queer (2004). His next book is God in Your Body, due out in 2006 from Jewish Lights.

Jake Marmer

Jake Marmer is a slam poet and Ph.D. candidate living in NYC. Much of his poetry, including the two pieces published in this issue, deal with the subjects of gender tension and metaphysics.

Jessica Leigh Lebos

Jessica Leigh Lebos lives among the redwoods of Northern California with her husband and two children. She also serves as the editor for Jmerica.com, a Jewish dating community, and tries to write poetry in between laundry, dishes and pottytraining. She can be reached at editor@jmerica.com.

Jessica Sacks

Jessica Sacks is a student living in Jerusalem and now sometimes cleans to Galgalatz.

Karen Alkaly-Gut

Karen Alkaly-Gut teaches poetry at Tel Aviv University, chairs the Israel Association of Writers in English, is on the board of the Yiddish Writers Union, is vice-chair of the Federation of Writers' Unions in Israel, and is a member of the Hebrew Writers' Union. She has published 20 books of poetry, five in Hebrew translation.

Karen Marston

Karen Marston lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She has participated in numerous exhibitions including 2005's Respiration, a solo exhibition at Taller Boricua Gallery in East Harlem. Marston serves on the Board of Directors of NURTUREart Non-Profit in Williamsburg, and hosts Muse Fuse, an informal monthly salon. Her web address is www.karenmarston.com.

Marilyn Hacker

Marilyn Hacker is the author of eleven books, most recently DESEPERANTO, published by W.W.Norton in 2003. Her translations of Emmanuel Moses' poems appear in the collection LAST NEWS OF MR NOBODY (Other Press, 2005). SHE SAYS, her translated collection of the poems of Venus Khoury-Ghata, was published by the Graywolf Press in 2003.

Matthue Roth

Depending who you ask, Matthue Roth lives in San Francisco, New York, Philadelphia, or Melbourne, Australia. He is a writer and performance poet. His first novel, Never Mind the Goldbergs, was published in February by Scholastic, and he keeps a secret journal at www.matthue.com. His favorite Orthodox girl's name is Igor.

Mordechai Shinefield

Mordechai Shinefield writes for The Forward, is Arts and Culture editor at The Commentator and has been involved with Mimaamakim for six years. He writes poems and raps, psalms and short fiction, music reviews and worshipful praise to his favorite bands. He is currently earning his BA in English Literature at Yeshiva University.

Motke Blum

Born in 1925, Motke Blum has studied and exhibited throughout Europe and the United States. His work is represented in many public places in Israel and abroad, in museums and important private collections. His studio is at Chutzot HaYotzer art Center at the foot of David's Citadel, outside the Old City.

Pinny Bulman

"I would like to dedicate *past understanding* to the homeless woman who sometimes slept in the building lobby of my childhood...perhaps this poem can serve in place of the name I never knew."

Rebecca Schweiger

Rebecca Schweiger lives and works in New York City. She has participated in museum and gallery exhibitions throughout the United States and Israel. "Shedding Layers: To Live Again" is on exhibition at The Roseline Koener Gallery in Westhampton, NY. She can be found on the web at www.rebeccarts.com.

Richard McBee

Richard McBee is a painter of Torah subject matter and writer on Jewish Art. In 1991 he helped found the American Guild of Judaic Art. He created and participated in the Jewish Art Forum discussion series in 1997 that was held at synagogues in New York. McBee contributes to the Forward and writes a column on the Jewish Arts for the Jewish Press. He continues to exhibit and his art work; paintings, relief sculptures, ceramic menorahs and other Judaica, are found in many private collections throughout the country.

Ron Pies

Ron Pies MD teaches psychiatry at Tufts University in Boston. He is the author of a collection of short stories (Zimmerman's Tefillin, PublishAmerica) and a collection of poetry (Creeping Thyme, Brandylane). He has published short stories in Mimaamakim, Moment, Midstream, Passager and other journals. He is also author of Ethics of the Sages (Jason Aronson). Ron says that the Sinatra story is, "partly autobiographical...and partly, my fevered imagination!"

Ronny Someck

Ronny Someck was born in Baghdad in 1951 and came to Israel as a young child. He has worked with street gangs, taught literature, and currently leads creative writing workshops. He has published 9 volumes of poetry (The last called "The Milk Underground") and a book for children, with his daughter Shirly (called "The Laughter Button"). He has been translated into 36 languages. Two selections of his poems have appeared in Arabic translation as well as one in French (with the ex-patriate Iraqi poet- A.K. El-Janabi), one in Catalan, one in Albanian, one in Italian and one in English- "The Fire Stays in Red." He has recorded three albums with the musician Elliott Sharp: "Revenge of the Stuttering Child", "Poverty Line" and "Short History of Vodka," and in 1998 exhibited in The Israel Museum a work entitled "Nature's Factory, Winter 2046" with Benny Efrat.

Sara Eisen

Sara Eisen (32) is a freelance writer and editor (fiction; arts and lifestyle journalism; web content) active in her Bet Shemesh, Israel community, where she lives with her husband and three sons. She dabbles in poetry, informal teen education, gourmet entertaining, psychological and literary readings of the Bible, and fitness.

Sarah Margles

Writing has always been for me a homing device of the internal kind. Through my travels from hometown Toronto, through my many adventures traveling in Europe and Asia, and most profoundly during my three years in Jerusalem, my pen has offered patience to my shifting self. Now a teacher, my students often write for me what needs to be said. (They also let me be a goofball, which is quite fun).

Shira Cantor

Shira Cantor graduated from Brandeis University with a BA in Fine Arts. She recently moved herself from Philadelphia to Yerushalayim.

Shlomo Rydzinski

Shlomo Rydzinski is the visual arts editor of the Mimaamakim journal, as well as a psychology student living in New York City. He aims for his artwork to engage with the experience of Orthodox Judaism as it is actually lived. His artwork can be found on www.mimaamakim.org.

Siona Benjamin

Siona Benjamin explores the women of the bible and brings them forward to combat the wars and violence of today in painted Midrash (interpretation), for her recent show "Fereshteh" ("angels" in Urdu). Ms. Benjamin is a Jewish Indian artist descended from the Bene Israel Tribe now living in the U.S.

Sipai Klein

Currently, Sipai is a Ph.D. student at New Mexico State University's Rhetoric and Professional Communication Program. He recently graduated from City College of New York with an M.A. in English with concentration in Creative Writing and wrote his thesis "The Braided Knot" under Marilyn Hacker.

Stuart Feinhor

Stuart Feinhor has masters degrees in counseling, Hebrew literature, and creative writing. The d'var Torah coach at Congregation Har Hashem, he is writing a book about his experience care giving for his aunt. His poems have appeared in 14 Hills, Cross Currents and at www.ActualArt.org. He lives in Boulder, Colorado.

Tova Messer

Tova Messer is a musical promoter and freelance writer in NYC. She holds a B.A. in English from Rutgers and recently completed an Internship at the Donald Maass Literary Agency. She has written reviews for Publishers Weekly and Shecky's Bar & Lounge Guide. She likes to dance.

Yehoshua Emden

The halacha of poetry is a personal mystery to me as I continue to write about my immediate experience. The syllogism of text turns into my mother's stirring soup ladle, the burdened lampposts gaze at streetwalkers like imposing Friday night candles, and truant glosses hang on the side of the page like frazzled tzitzit. Exploring the vernacular of the senses has given me disclosures in a piecewise manner, a patient expanse composed of camera snaps. In the blend of material and idea I hope to continue extracting the design of the first of poetic law.

Yerra Sugarman

Yerra Sugarman received the 2005 PEN/Joyce Osterweil Poetry Award for her first book, *Forms of Gone* (Sheep Meadow 2002). She's also received a "Discovery"/*The Nation* Prize, ACM's Chicago Literary Award, a Bogin Award from the PSA, an Academy of American Poets Prize. She teaches writing at NYU and City College.

Yona Leroy

Yona Leroy is a freelance Beat Kabbalist. He splits time between San Francisco and the Pardes. After receiving an education from the secret *lamed vavnik* in the back of his *shtiebel*, he traveled the world, hopping freight trains, exorcising dybuchs and giving bar mitzvah lessons on the side. His greatest accomplishment to date (aside from publication in Mima'amakim) has been accompanying Elijah on his Passover rounds for the last three years. Your wine was *geshmak*.

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