

“When You’re Dead, You’re Dead!”

The first time I heard it I was twenty-nine years old. Not that there was anything unusual about being twenty-nine. But I still wonder how I managed to live so long in a country like America without ever having heard anything like it—particularly since I practically grew up in the newspaper business, where you hear just about everything.

It did, indeed, seem pretty far-fetched—even more farfetched than the story I had heard when I was in California, and that one had seriously strained the seams of credibility. While on the West Coast on business one year, I struck up a friendship with a jeweler who told me that every Thursday night, she and some girlfriends got together with a hypnotist. My friend said she had been a princess in another life and knew that detail to be true because, through the miracle of hypnosis, she regularly traveled back in time to visit the magnificence of her previous existence. If I came, she said, the hypnotist would be happy to hypnotize me as well.

“Who knows,” she said enthusiastically. “Maybe you were once a queen or something.”

Right. Or maybe I was another Sidd Finch and could throw a fastball at 168 miles an hour. Of course, Sidd Finch couldn’t really throw a fastball that fast either. But after the April 1, 1985, issue of *Sports Illustrated* hit the newsstands, just about every baseball fan in America was waiting with baited breath for this tall, lanky, twenty-eight-year-old French horn-playing Buddhist mystic from Tibet named Hayden (Sidd) Finch to sign a contract with the New York Mets. According to the article, written by George Plimpton, the fervor over the Mets newest pitching prospect began on March 14 during spring training in St. Petersburg, Florida. That was when Mel Stottlemyre, the pitching

coach, asked hitters John Christensen, Dave Cochrane, and Lenny Dykstra to take a couple of swings at some pitches from someone the Mets were considering signing. Sidd Finch then stepped up to the mound and fired in some balls that registered 150 to 168 miles per hour on a JUGS Supergun II radar gun. It was all pretty hush-hush at first. Even Mets owner Nelson Doubleday, wrote Plimpton, was there.

Except that he wasn't there—and for a very good reason. There was no Sidd Finch! He didn't exist. The article turned out to be completely bogus. Plimpton eventually developed a good baseball novel out of it—*The Curious Case of Sidd Finch* (MacMillan). But when the story first ran, everyone believed it.

I marveled at how sincerely my friend believed she had been a princess. She had even read books that articulately and authoritatively expounded on the “truths” of reincarnation. But just because something appeared in print didn't make it so.

Consider, for example, the curious case of the origin of the bathtub. In 1917 noted journalist H. L. Mencken wove a masterpiece of fabrication that has yet to become completely undone.

In one of the most fanciful newspaper hoaxes of all time, Mencken, then a writer for the *New York Evening Mail*, wrote a piece hailing the 75th anniversary of the bathtub, a convenience that he said came to this country in 1842 thanks to a man named Adam Thompson. Mencken wrote that Thompson had a 7- x 4-foot, 1,750-pound tub installed in his home in Cincinnati and immediately suffered the rebuke of many Americans who vilified the vessel, calling it a variety of names including immoral, elitist, unhealthy, and, of all things, unlawful. Mencken even claimed that bathing finally gained respectability only after President Millard Fillmore had the first bathtub installed in the White House in 1851.¹

Eight and one-half years later, Mencken confessed that the entire article was pure hooey, but by then his “facts” had made it around the globe and had been reprinted and believed the world over. Even his retraction couldn't retract them. According to an article in *Country Home* magazine, Mencken had had this to say about that:

I began to encounter my preposterous “facts” in the writings of other men. They began to be cited by medical men as proof of the progress of

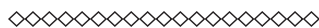
*public hygiene. . . They were alluded to on the floor of Congress. They crossed the ocean and were discussed solemnly in England and on the continent. I began to find them in standard works of reference. Today, I believe, they are accepted as gospel everywhere on Earth.*²

Just how much bogus material has actually become woven into the fabric of everyday life on this earth is anyone's guess. Apparently the weaving is not all that hard to do; yet the process of separating the truth from the fiction can often be a tough and painful extraction.

A world-renowned educator once showed a convention hall filled with teachers how to enable a young student to get in touch with a "friendly spirit guide" who would help her learn better. His fans praised and applauded his work; his detractors said he was using the little girl to channel demons. Both sides claimed to possess the truth. Obviously, one side was wrong.

Fiction masquerading as truth may not matter much when it comes to things like baseball and bathtubs. But what about when it comes to the weightier matters of life? Is there reincarnation? Is there a God? Did God create the world, or did it evolve over billions and billions of years? Is there life beyond the grave? Who is Jesus, anyway? If there is a God, what is He like? Does He care about me, and how can I find Him? These are important issues. What is the truth? How much fiction concerning these subjects has wormed its way into the annals of existence so that we swallow the deception whole without blinking an eye?

Mencken wrote three retractions of his bathtub bunkum, but to no avail. The die had been cast. The fiction had been so successfully woven into the fabric of human life that even Mencken himself couldn't pull it out. Why? "No normal human being," he wrote, "wants to hear the truth. It is the passion of a small and aberrant minority. . . . They are hated for telling it while they live, and when they die they are swiftly forgotten. What remains in the world . . . is a series of long-tested and solidly agreeable lies."³



When I was twenty-nine I knew I had heard the biggest lie of all. I was happily sewing a maternity top for myself on my mother's little

black Singer Featherweight when I stopped to listen to a television interview that had captured my attention. First, there was a little talk about Judaism—something I knew a great deal about—then a little more talk about Messiah.

Anxious to hear about that rarely mentioned, almost mystical being who my Hebrew school teacher had said would someday come and right all wrongs done to my people, I temporarily abandoned my machine and strolled over to the television. I gazed expectantly into the face of the pleasant-looking Jewish man being interviewed.

“The Jewish people have been looking for the Messiah for thousands of years, haven’t they?” said the program’s host.

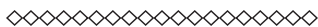
“Yes,” replied the gentleman, “and he has already come.”

“What?” I asked aloud, as if someone had been there to answer. “What in the world is he talking about?” The man who had casually piqued my interest suddenly became the object of my intense scrutiny. He was relatively handsome—no bizarre distinguishing characteristics. His dark, wavy hair was stylishly well trimmed; his suit, conservative and tasteful; and his speech, articulate—all of which made me wonder how such a normal-looking Jew could be so grossly misinformed.

“Jesus is the Messiah my people have been looking for all along,” he said.

JESUS! JESUS! Of all people! Where in the world did he ever get the idea that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel! Was he NUTS! Was he INSANE! JESUS! Who in the world could possibly believe THAT! In all my twenty-nine years I had never heard anything so preposterous or so utterly detestable.

The man continued to talk, but I had stopped listening. In those brief moments, my surprise had escalated into indignation, then into unbridled outrage. Unwilling to hear another word, I lunged forward, turned off the TV, and banished the now repulsive-looking traitor from my home, screaming over and over at the darkened television set, “You’re not fit to call yourself a Jew!”



I had grown up in a Conservative Jewish home. In an age when “dys-functional” seemed to characterize the average family, mine functioned

perfectly. Perhaps it was because family was so important to my parents. Both of them were immigrants who had escaped the long arm of Adolph Hitler. Dad, the middle of eight children, was born on December 19, 1899, in what was then Austria-Hungary. My father had considered himself an Austrian until, one day, he found that Romania had absorbed his part of the world.

According to my Uncle Saul (my father's brother and the only one who ever told me anything about my father's life in Europe), Dad had been exempted from military service to Austria-Hungary because he was severely underweight. But the Romanian army was not so fussy. It dispatched men on horseback who hunted my father down, seized him, and force-marched him for several days all the way back to a location deep in Romania. My uncle chuckled as he told the story, because the intent of the army to do my father harm actually turned out for his good. By the time he arrived at the appointed destination, he was so emaciated and near death that the army rejected him anyway, a move that actually saved his life. If there was one place you did not want to be if you were a Jew, it was the Romanian army.

Romania had no love for the Jewish people. It harshly discriminated against them to the point of even denying them civil rights through Article VII of its 1866 constitution. The article was eventually repealed, but the clause in the 1923 constitution that granted them citizenship provoked such violent hostility among the Gentiles that many Jews outwardly embraced Christianity just to avoid persecution, longing all the while to be able to live like Jews.

I know almost nothing about my father's parents apart from their names and the fact that they both died in Europe. At some point the eldest brother, Itzak, managed to make his way to New York City, where he earned enough money to bring the next eldest brother, Moshe. After Uncle Mo arrived, the two combined forces to finance passage for the third brother. Then came brother number four—Louis, my dad. He arrived with his older sister in 1922. They entered the *Goldene Medina*—the Golden Land, as America was fondly called in Yiddish—through Ellis Island, sailing into New York Harbor past the Statue of Liberty that bears the immortal words of a Jewish girl named Emma Lazarus, who must have understood something of the melancholy history of her people.

*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*

The *Goldene Medina*. Unfortunately, one of Daddy's brothers and three of his sisters were still yearning to breathe free when America slammed the golden door shut. My father and his sister Anna became the last of the family to enter the United States. The remaining four made it to Montreal, Canada.

As a skinny, poor, and uneducated European Jew arriving in New York City during the Depression, Dad possessed more hope than he did anything else. Often he had little to eat. He painted houses for a living but hated it. Eventually, he settled in Vermont, where he started his own shaving brush-manufacturing company. Then, in 1947, while visiting my uncle in Montreal, he met my mother. They were married in Montreal in 1948.

Of the wretchedness Daddy left behind in Romania, he said absolutely nothing. No matter how difficult life was here, it was infinitely better than it was there, particularly for Jews. He had gratefully become an American with no desire to return to Europe even for a visit—if, indeed, there was anyone left to visit. When World War II had ended in 1945, Jewish life around the globe was in chaos. Few Jews knew who among their relatives in Europe had survived the Holocaust or how to find them.

My mother endured for fifteen years not knowing what had befallen her family. Mom was born in the Ukraine in 1915 during the final, turbulent years of Nicholas II, the last czar of Russia and a vicious anti-Semite. Jews, as usual, feared for their lives. Bands of cutthroats routinely descended upon Jewish villages and homes, massacring defenseless Jewish men, women, and children in organized, government-sanctioned killing sprees called *pogroms*. The only time the authorities interfered was to prevent the Jewish people from protecting themselves.

The Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 did not improve things. After the czarist government collapsed, the Bolsheviks took up the mantle of persecution and tried to exterminate the Jews completely. Between 1919

and 1921 there were an estimated 1,200 pogroms in the Ukraine alone.

My mother never really knew her parents. Her father was murdered while driving a vegetable wagon to market. Mom was three. Her older brother was about five at the time, and her younger brother was about a year old. My grandmother was so devastated she died a year later, leaving her three children to her parents, whose names I don't know.

Like my father, my mother never talked much about that time in her life apart from expressing her devotion to her brothers, whom she missed terribly. At age sixteen she was persuaded to sail to North America using documents that falsified her age to make her older. Emigrating would preserve her life, she was told. The Communist government refused to release her older brother because he was due to enter the army and contended that her younger brother was too young to leave.

So in 1931, alone and knowing not a word of English, she left behind the only two people in the world who she felt really loved her, and she traveled steerage aboard a ship that brought her to the new world—the city of Montreal, Canada. Her Uncle Akiva, an Orthodox Jewish rabbi, made a home for her with his wife and their four Canadian-born children. They communicated in Yiddish, the universal language of Judaism that spans all oceans, crosses all cultures, and binds together the physical descendants of Jacob.

Homesick for her family in the Ukraine and unspeakably lonely, my mother cried herself to sleep each night on her cot in the kitchen. At some point she went to work in a factory filled with Russian-Jewish immigrants and made friendships that lasted her whole life. Every dime she earned she saved with dreams of bringing her brothers to Montreal. Sometimes she dipped into the nest egg to purchase fabric for suits for them with the dubious assurance that the fabric would make its way to the Soviet Union.

At night she lay on her cot and read for hours by candlelight, trying to master English by devouring books. And master it she did. She learned it so well, in fact, that when she left the factory for a better position as a salesgirl in a department store, she spoke impeccable English with a Canadian accent and was on her way to what would become fluency in French also. But she continued to write in Russian to her brothers. Through their letters, they exchanged bits of their lives. She shared in both their marriages through photographs, and she rejoiced over the

births of her older brother's children. In 1942 a photograph arrived of her older brother, his wife and children, and her younger brother with his wife. My mother brought it to a photo studio in Montreal, had an enlargement made, and had her picture inserted in a space that seemed divinely appointed for that very purpose. It was the last communication she would ever receive from any of them. Shortly after the picture was taken, the Nazis arrived.

Soon news began circulating about Nazis herding Jews like cattle into boxcars and incinerating them in ovens. By the time the war ended in 1945, she had no idea who was dead or who was alive.

Around 1958, through relatives who had made it to Israel, my mother learned of her family's fate. Her sisters-in-law, her baby niece and nephew, and her younger brother were all dead. Only her older brother had survived, and she was warned never to contact him because it would mean his certain death. She kept her finest picture of him on our piano all her life and died in 1967 without ever seeing him again.

Because they understood only too well how thin the thread of Jewish life could be, nothing was more important to my parents than my brother and me. They strove to keep our little household secure and often admonished us to "stay close. Keep the family together." They made sure we never doubted their love for us, and they bestowed upon us a wonderful home-life filled with good times, warmth, and tenderness.

My father particularly lavished us with outward shows of love and affection. He even made up little songs for my brother and me that we happily sang with him, and he delighted us with adventurous bedtime stories that usually revolved around his favorite pastime—fishing.

Fishing was never my idea of a good time, but it taught me a lot about my dad. He was a saint with the patience of Job. He could sit contentedly for hours in a little boat on Lake Champlain, surrounded by Vermont countryside. I think it was Daddy's idea of heaven on Earth. It sure was not mine. I never understood how thirty minutes of actual fish-catching compensated for the other eight hours of total boredom. But Daddy loved it. He loved the peace and quiet. He loved the fresh air. He loved to fish. He loved living in Vermont. But most of all, he loved having our whole family together.

And he was smart. Given the opportunity to get an education, he could have become an outstanding engineer. He designed almost every

machine used in his factory and could duplicate the most complex piece of equipment simply by looking at a picture of it. When homemade go-carts became the rage, he and my brother went to his factory every night after dinner. There they built my brother a go-cart that became the envy of every boy on the block. It was so aerodynamically sound it handily won every race in the neighborhood.

He also played an expert game of chess. He won the regional chess championship every year for almost ten years running, and one year he came within inches of capturing the New England chess championship. Dad didn't talk much about politics, but he made certain of his views well known. He detested the British and Franklin Roosevelt, and he adored Harry S. Truman. I'm convinced that the events of the 1940s forever shaped both my father's politics and his theology. Dad had seen Hitler systematically exterminate two-thirds of European Jewry while the rest of the world—including the United States—looked on, refusing to provide sanctuary. Whereas the U.S. had admitted Jews generously prior to 1933, it accepted only a paltry 200,000 Jewish refugees between 1933 and 1943, when they still could have escaped⁴ from Europe, and an open door would have saved millions of lives.

One of the few times I ever saw my father livid was when he told me about President Roosevelt and the voyage of the SS *St. Louis*. The *St. Louis* was an oceanliner that had left Germany for Cuba on May 13, 1939, carrying 930 Jewish passengers fleeing the Nazis. When it arrived in Cuba, the government refused to honor the visas and revoked the landing certificates. It cold-bloodedly demanded one million dollars to let the refugees disembark. No country would provide the funds or give the Jewish people sanctuary. Roosevelt refused them entrance into the United States despite repeated appeals, including one from the ship's German captain and another that ran as an editorial in *The New York Times*. In addition, the U.S. Coast Guard patrolled the waters, choking anyone's hope of even swimming to safety. As the ship sailed back to Europe and death, the passengers could see the lights of Miami, Florida, glowing in the distance.⁵

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free." But the desperate Jews of Europe, nobody wanted. Even today America bears that disgrace. "The refusal of the Western democracies, especially the United States, to give them refuge and shelter is

second in infamy only to the slaughter and persecution themselves,” writes Abba Eban in his book *Personal Witness, Israel Through My Eyes* (Putnam).⁶ For this cause, my father hated Franklin Roosevelt.

He detested the British for much the same reason. By the latter part of its mandate rule of Palestine, the British government bore no resemblance to the Britain that had birthed the Balfour Declaration in November 1917, supporting the establishment of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. By World War II things had changed drastically. The British government had become so anti-Jewish that it unflinchingly refused to allow Jews fleeing Hitler to enter the Holy Land, even though the Palestinian Arabs were aligned with Germany—Britain’s sworn enemy—and the Palestinian Jews were fighting in the British army.

Britain clearly exhibited its bias in 1941 when the *Struma* arrived. The *Struma* was a broken-down ship that had miraculously made its way from Europe to Palestine loaded with Jewish refugees. Rather than give it permission to dock, the British let it sink in the Mediterranean. More than seven hundred people died, including more than three hundred women and children.⁷

After the war ended, Britain appeared even more determined not to let a single person of Jewish blood set foot on the ancient soil. In 1947 the ship *Exodus* arrived at Haifa, bearing 4,500 destitute Jewish men, women, and children who had survived the death camps. Rather than let them enter Palestine, the British used rifle butts, hose pipes, and tear gas to forcibly transfer these concentration camp victims to British prison boats, where they were locked in cages and shipped back to Europe.⁸

My father helplessly looked on. What he saw was a Gentile world that cared nothing for the children of Israel. The Jewish people had groped their way through a crucible of anguish and torture that qualified as one of the darkest commentaries on man’s inhumanity to man, only to be further stomped and beaten down in their time of need. Had it not been for one man, in Dad’s view, the Jewish people would still be homeless today.

That man, of course, was Harry S. Truman. Against the vitriolic protests of the entire U.S. State Department and the American delegation at the United Nations, both of which were working feverishly to convince the UN to revoke its November 29, 1947, partition of Palestine,

Harry Truman bestowed American presidential recognition upon the fledgling Jewish homeland eleven minutes after it declared its statehood on May 14, 1948.⁹ That lone act had turned my father into a Truman fan forever. The other events of that decade, however, had turned him into an atheist. If there were a God, Daddy said, He would not have allowed six million Jews to die at the savage hands of the Nazis.

My father's atheism precluded him from encouraging me toward any faith in God. It was, after all, one thing to be a Jew and quite another to be religious. He had sacrificed considerably to send my brother and me to Hebrew school from kindergarten through high school. Yet he refused to attend the synagogue except to take us to the Purim carnival or to see us in a performance there or to cheer us on when we graduated or received an award.

In fact, he never would have joined the synagogue at all had it not been for our family doctor who was the president of the congregation at the time. Where my mother had failed, the doctor was successful in convincing Dad that if he wanted his children to grow up as Jews, they needed a Jewish education. So Daddy joined the *shul* (Yiddish for synagogue) and supported us in everything we did, including the seemingly endless and laborious task of chauffeuring us to and from the place two or three times a day, four and sometimes five days a week, so we could attend classes. And he did it without complaint because he wanted us to understand our Jewish heritage. Jews, he said, had to stick together or they would be annihilated by a hateful, anti-Semitic world. Consequently, my father forbade me to date anyone who wasn't Jewish; and although he loved me as much as any man could possibly love a daughter, he also warned me that if I ever married outside the faith, he would cast me off forever.

His irreligiosity made life somewhat difficult for my mother. Her Uncle Akiva, the Orthodox rabbi, had instructed her diligently in the importance of the traditions of the faith. During her first years of marriage, she lit the Sabbath candles faithfully every Friday night until Dad's scorn became more than she could bear and she quit—but not before teaching me how to do it. She always wanted to attend synagogue during the high holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), but my father wouldn't purchase the required tickets until the last two years of my mother's agony with cancer. Out of his love for her he relented,

and they went together.

Although we held no formal ceremonial observances in our home, Mom was a fabulous cook and treated us to all the traditional goodies that accompanied each Jewish holiday. An immaculate housekeeper, she became even more immaculate at Passover, thoroughly scouring everything to rid our home of leaven in accordance with Jewish law. Although we never kept kosher to the point of maintaining separate sets of dinnerware for milk meals and meat meals, we never *ever* mixed milk with meat, and we maintained separate dinnerware for Passover—my favorite holiday of the year. For eight days we ate nothing containing leaven. I even took peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on matzoh to school for lunch. It wasn't my favorite, but Mom more than made up for it with the marvelous holiday dinners she prepared.

Mealtimes were always fun because we sat around the dining room table and talked, unless, of course, my dad's family was over. Then my brother became the only person I could understand. All the adult conversation switched to Yiddish. How my brother and I failed to conquer that language is beyond me, considering it was all my parents ever spoke to each other. At family get-togethers, my brother and I would head for the television while the aunts and uncles hashed over the smallest to greatest events of life in Yiddish.

At my uncle's home in Montreal, it was Yiddish again; but my brother and I so adored our Uncle Saul that we contented ourselves until he was free to talk to us—in English. The worst afflictions were the dreaded visits with *Mima* and *Fetter* (Yiddish for aunt and uncle). *Fetter* was my mother's dear Uncle Akiva. We had been taught to call them Grandma and Grandpa. They were elderly, gentle, frail-looking old-world people who still lived in the Jewish immigrant section of Montreal. They spoke not a word of English, had no television I could ever locate, and lived in an apartment that seemed as though it had not benefited from an open window since the Bolshevik Revolution. My brother and I would vegetate in their dark, stuffy living room with nothing to do while my parents chatted with them for hours in Yiddish. Fishing was more fun.

Our frequent jaunts to Montreal also involved making the rounds of various kosher butcher shops and fish markets, where we would lay in enough supplies to keep our freezer stocked for months. Kosher

meats and other Jewish specialty items were cheaper and easier to find in Montreal.

Cheaper was good. Daddy's business declined steadily in the 1960s. Before it got so bad that she could no longer afford it, my mother bought only kosher meats. Beef came from the kosher butcher shop; but the chickens were another story. For those, she sent my father to the *shochet* (pronounced shoiychet in Yiddish), the only man in town certified to slaughter poultry in the manner prescribed by Jewish law.

Our chickens were certainly the freshest in the neighborhood: They were the only ones with feathers and feet still on them! First Mom would "flick" the chickens, as she called it, removing the feathers. Then she severed the bony, skinny feet and stored them for use later in a recipe with an unpronounceable Yiddish name, a yellowish green appearance, and a taste I have mercifully forgotten. Then she cut the chickens, cleaned the chickens, and soaked the chickens in salt to remove all trace of blood, as dictated by Jewish law.

It devastated her when she finally had to resort to buying *trayf* (non-kosher). She was so ashamed that she would bury the poultry in the bottom of her shopping cart, hoping that no one from the Jewish community would see it.

Rarely was there money for store-bought clothes. Almost everything I wore she made on her little black Singer Featherweight, which she set up on the dining room table. Every sweater I owned she had knitted or had taught me how to knit.

At forty-six, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. I was eleven years old. Despite surgery after surgery, she never gave up. I'll never forget the time I outgrew my favorite party dress. There was no money to buy fabric to make another. So she carefully took it apart, redesigned it, recut it, and reassembled it. She added a little scrap of lace here, a little strip of ribbon there, and presented me with the most beautiful dress I had ever seen.

It seemed as though she never slept. At night in bed, I could hear the steady hum of her little machine sewing away downstairs. Every curtain and drapery in the house was made by my mother. She even made my bedspread. She stripped all the floors and woodwork and refinished them. All this she did while wearing a back brace, necessary after a spinal fusion of dubious worth that probably would not even

have been performed today.

For six long years she suffered with cancer. The more her condition deteriorated, the more she spoke to me about death. Her outlook was bleak: "I'll be six feet under and that will be the end of it," she would say. But I could tell that she longed for more. Ever the reader, she scrupulously examined books with titles like *Man's Search for Meaning*; but the peace she sought through her heartbreaking illness always managed to elude her. She once summed up the results of all her research with the old Jewish standby: "When you're dead, you're dead."

My mother finally succumbed to cancer in January 1967. I had just turned seventeen. My brother was fourteen. My father was sixty-seven. Her death devastated him. He never really recovered, but he never complained. Some months later the three of us went through her old steamer trunk. It had journeyed with her all the way from the Ukraine those many years ago and now held her most treasured items: old photos of family and friends, family records, my baby book, my brother's baby blanket, her favorite pairs of shoes. . . . For the first time in my life, I saw my father cry.

"There will never be anyone for me but your mother," he told me. And there never was. Mother's death drew us even closer to each other and to my Uncle Saul.

One morning, while Dad was sitting in the kitchen drinking his customary coffee from an old *yahrtzeit** glass (a glass that originally contained a candle that burned for 24 hours to commemorate the anniversary of the death of a loved one), he looked at me and said, "Something's wrong with Saul."

"How do you know that?" I asked. "He's probably fine."

"I just know," he replied. "I haven't heard from him in a few days." Daddy and Uncle Saul usually spoke by telephone every day. So Dad called Montreal and discovered his brother had suffered a heart attack. My ordinarily composed father was so shaken that he could not even drive. For the first time ever, he boarded a bus to Montreal and nearly collapsed in the hospital when he saw the extent of the paraphernalia wired to my uncle in an effort to keep him alive. From then on, we all feared that my uncle's days were numbered.

Yet in June 1970, it was my father who died. He had lived just long enough to see my brother graduate from high school two weeks earlier.

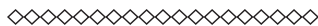
I had completed my junior year at the University of Vermont and had barely arrived in Los Angeles with my friend Nancy to attend the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) for the summer. My brother called and we immediately flew home.

My brother picked us up at the airport. Apparently Daddy had suffered a massive stroke. He never regained consciousness. My brother, looking so thin and burdened down, comforted me by reaffirming what we had been taught all our lives. "Lorna," he said, "we've got to stay close. We've got to always keep the family together."

We buried my father next to my mother in Hebrew Holy Society Cemetery and immediately went to my uncle's home in Montreal where we sat *Shiva* (7-day period of intense mourning). I felt so bad for Uncle Saul. I knew that losing Daddy had shattered him almost as much as it had us. Because of his bad heart, everyone had assumed he would die first, although he was much younger than my father.

Uncle Saul was always special to us. We loved him with the same loyalty with which we had loved my dad. And we knew that he loved us. Many times, through all kinds of weather, we drove to Montreal to see him. Over and over he assured us that he would take care of us as though we were his own; and we knew he meant it.

But that was not to be. About six months after Daddy died, Uncle Saul died in Montreal. As far as my brother and I were concerned, there was no one left. The aunts and uncles remaining on my father's side lived far away and rarely called. It was truly just the two of us now. We were on our own.



Fortunately, Burlington, Vermont, was a small, tightly knit community. We had lived there all our lives and had many good friends. During my freshman year at the University of Vermont, I had started working part-time at the local newspaper, where the managing editor treated me more like a daughter than an employee. He started me out in the back shop setting type and proofreading; but after two years, he moved me into the newsroom, where I began to write.

There I groaned my way through hours of obituaries, fender-benders, and rewrites. The rewrites were the worst. All press releases and copy

turned in by correspondents landed in the rewrite basket, to be fished out later and transformed into proper newspaper articles by either a reporter who had nothing to do (which was never) or me. I was certain the odious things bred in captivity. By the end of my first year in the newsroom, I decided that I had descended into rewrite hell.

One night, as I plodded through the basket, a big story broke. The education commissioner had resigned. One of our reporters at the state capital had gotten the story but had not secured all the necessary information; and the deadline for the early edition was fast approaching.

“Lorna,” the state editor shouted across the newsroom. “Call up the education commissioner and ask him *blah blah blah*” (he told me what to ask). It was now 11 p.m.—not the friendliest time to be calling people at home. Nor was I the best person for the task. Besides being young and inexperienced, I was extremely timid and unsure of myself. Out of terror, I scrupulously avoided anything that even hinted at public speaking, and I tried desperately to blend into the background everywhere I went. The thought of calling the commissioner of education paralyzed me.

“I can’t do that,” I shouted back.

“Just do it!”

Reluctantly, I called. I apologized for the lateness of the hour, asked the question, and hung up. Without leaving my desk, I relayed the man’s reply to my state editor.

“Well, why didn’t you ask him *blah blah blah*?” he shouted back.

“Because you didn’t tell me,” I said.

“Call him back.”

“I can’t call him back,” I said, thoroughly embarrassed.

“Just call him back, Lorna.”

I called back, apologized profusely, asked the question, and hung up. When I gave my editor the response, the next thing I heard was, “Why didn’t you ask him . . .” and a new set of *blah blah blahs*. “Call him back.”

“No!” I protested. “I won’t call him back.”

Finally the matter was turned over to a reporter who not only called back but stayed on the phone awhile and turned out a nice little story. “I’ll never make a reporter,” I thought to myself.

But my editors didn’t give up on me. Several months later the state editor got wind of the fact that one of our United States senators was

home for the weekend.

"Lorna," he again bellowed across the newsroom. "Call Senator (Robert) Stafford and ask him what he plans to do about *blah blah blah*. Here's his home phone number."

"Isn't there anyone else who can do it?" I protested, desperate to wrangle my way out of it.

"No," he said. "Everyone else is busy."

Determined not to repeat my previous fiasco, I carefully orchestrated my offensive. First, of course, I would introduce myself and state what newspaper I was with. Since we were by far the largest one in the state, I knew he had to speak to me. Then I deliberated at length over the phraseology, rehearsed my little speech and my questions at least ten times, screwed my courage to the sticking place, dialed the telephone number, and waited.

Soon a man answered the phone, and I launched into my well-prepared dissertation. I was quite proud of myself. After I finished, I perched my fingers atop the typewriter keys and got ready to record the senator's response. That's when the voice on the other end of the line replied: "Honey, I'd love to help you, but this is Hargreaves Market."

Hargreaves Market! I was mortified. After all that work it turned out I had dialed the wrong number! When I regained my composure and called again, I mercifully discovered that Senator Stafford was out for the evening. And so began my career in journalism.

In due time, though, I learned my craft. As a general assignment reporter, I covered a smattering of everything: education, lawsuits, labor disputes, prison breaks, press conferences, etc. Eventually I became one of the reporters to fill in at the Capitol Bureau when a statehouse reporter was sick or on vacation. I grew accustomed to dealing with members of the prominent elite as well as the obscure and downtrodden; and I generally knew what was going on even when it wasn't fit to print. It became standard practice to pick up the telephone and get through to whomever I chose; and when I wanted information, I went directly to the source, be it a senator, a commissioner, or a dishwasher.

I also grew accustomed to dealing with death as news. There was death by heart attack, death by drowning, death by fatal car accident, death by suicide. You name it. Murder was the only form I couldn't get used to, but even then I did my job. News was news.

One dark night I almost froze in a blizzard while trying to cover an airplane crash. The area was so remote and the snow so deep that the only way I could reach the site was to inch my way behind the snowplows that were laboriously carving out a path for the police cars and ambulances. Shortly before midnight, I trudged through the snow in search of a telephone to call in the story. I finally found one in a cow barn that I hated to leave because it was warm, dry, and lit. But the story was not in the barn. So after I finished dictating, I went back into the darkness and snow, where I remained until the wee hours of the morning, watching as rescue workers on snowmobiles extracted one body after another from the wreckage and transported them down the slope to the ambulances. The only lights outside were the moon, the stars, and the headlamps on the snowmobiles as they glided up the mountain in search of life, only to return to us with yet another body in a bag. There were no survivors.

As all good editors do, mine saw to it that I was thoroughly schooled in the overriding importance of accuracy and truth. No corroboration—no story. Truth, however, is not always easy to recognize, even when you're looking for it. I once covered a bitter controversy that overtook the state when a group of people calling themselves "born-again" Christians objected to an elementary school social studies curriculum that they claimed taught evolution and genocide. I spent weeks researching the story. I sat in the classroom and observed as the curriculum was being taught. I interviewed children, teachers, superintendents, and school board members across the state. I watched the same films the children watched, talked to a creator of the program at Harvard, and sniffed out every little detail I could in an attempt to write a fair and accurate story.

What resulted was a four-part series that everyone generally considered very well balanced—everyone that is, but the born-again Christians. They were a stubborn and narrow-minded lot, to my way of thinking. For some reason, they felt that I had missed the point of their argument.

Their gravest concern had revolved around the materials that taught the lifestyle of a primitive tribe of Eskimos. These Eskimos routinely left infant girls and old people out on the ice to die because it was simply inexpedient to drag them around from village to village.

"Is your teacher teaching you that it's okay to do this?" I had asked a little blond-headed boy as I milled around the classroom, questioning

students.

"No," he replied.

"Well," I continued, "how do you feel about it?"

"It's just what they do. That's how they live," he said matter-of-factly, accepting the practice of genocide as though it were a simple mathematical equation. Did the material teach that genocide was right? No. And it didn't teach that it was wrong either.

The born-again Christians denounced the curriculum from start to finish. They said it taught secular humanism in a form subtly designed to infiltrate the minds of impressionable youngsters with the intent of eroding the basic moral absolutes of right and wrong. Everyone else said the Christians were nuts.

Interestingly, they were the only people I met the entire time I lived in Vermont who claimed to be "born again." Not that I had the foggiest notion what that meant. I assumed it described Gentiles who had stopped attending church and then, at some point, had decided to give religion a second chance. Although these Christians seemed more intense than most, they never saw fit to explain the terminology; and I assumed that a rose by any other name As far as I was concerned, Jews were born Jewish and Gentiles were born Christian, with the exception of those who were obviously born something else, such as Buddhist, Hindu, Shinto, etc. At this particular meeting we all stuck to the topic of the curriculum, and not once did anyone mention the name of Jesus.

At twenty-six I was promoted to city editor. It didn't take me long to realize that my new position jettisoned almost everything I had enjoyed most about my work. Instead of being out where the action was (covering a story), I was trapped behind a desk; instead of writing my own copy, I was fixing everybody else's; and instead of being responsible for myself, I was responsible for myself and everyone else as well. More than that, though, I was ready to leave Vermont.

Fortunately, it was the 1970s, and the newspaper business was going through an industrial revolution that had been a long time in coming. Computers were rapidly modernizing every aspect of an industry that had been dependent on archaic technology for generations. I caught on quickly; and when the newsroom retired its old Underwoods and installed computer terminals, the computer company offered me a job.

I jumped at it. My brother, who was two and one-half years younger than I, had already married and left for graduate school. So I sold our home, exchanged my Associated Press Style Manual for what felt like one hundred pounds of computer books, and I moved to Boston.

It was a change I anticipated with great joy. The Boston area had a large Jewish population, which I felt dramatically improved my chances of eventually marrying a nice, Jewish man. So, with briefcase in one hand and company Air Travel Card in the other, I said goodbye to Vermont and began flying to newspapers across the country, installing software for computerized phototypesetting systems.

For a small-town girl, it was a dream come true. Although I lived out of a suitcase for months at a time and occasionally longed for a good, home-cooked meal, I loved the work; I loved the travel; I loved my life. Into this idyllic circumstance walked the man I was to marry.



James was unlike anyone I had ever dated. Twenty-five years my senior, he was a successful, high-powered corporate executive who knew what he wanted and was accustomed to getting it. He had a reputation for being smart and self-confident, with a low threshold for incompetence or insubordination. An impeccable dresser, he was extremely handsome, with silver gray hair and clear blue eyes that quickly penetrated even the toughest façade. His quiet, dignified reserve, courtly manners, and charming southern accent, combined with the power he wielded, made him an intimidating presence to many. Yet he treated everyone with equal fairness and respect.

James was a listener, not a talker. He could deftly size up a person after five minutes of conversation. Although he was tenderhearted, considerate, and affectionate, he unmistakably called the shots; he made the decisions, and he comfortably bore the responsibility. In short, he was everything I had ever dreamed of in a husband, with one crucial exception: He wasn't Jewish.

Two people could hardly have been more different. Whereas I was emotional and easily frustrated, James was unflappable. The man never got excited about anything. Even in the most difficult circumstance, he always remained cool, composed, and collected. It was a quality I grew

to depend upon.

"How can you stay so calm?" I once asked, agitated to the core about something myself.

"Nothin' to it, honey," he'd say with a smile, a wink, and a snap of his fingers. "When you get excited, you can't think."

The biggest difference, however, was not in our temperaments. It was in our backgrounds. James was a southerner who could trace his lineage all the way back to colonial America, when the king of England is said to have deeded his family a huge tract of property in North Carolina via a land grant. I barely knew my grandparents' names. In his entire life he had never heard a word of Yiddish. He understood nothing of Jewish history, culture, or tradition and knew nothing of the Jewish religion except that it categorically rejected Jesus. He also knew little about the Jewish dietary laws and could not comprehend my horror the first time I looked into his refrigerator and spied a container of what he proudly explained was bacon grease. I almost got sick. Who in the world cooked with that! Chicken fat—now that was a different story.

By the time we met, my parents, of course, had long since passed away. But I didn't have to wonder what they would have thought. Had James been Jewish, they would have been happy. He was a dependable, respected, successful professional who offered me love, security, and material comfort—all the qualities they had prized so highly as essentials for happiness. But he *wasn't* Jewish. He was a *goy* (Gentile); and in the end, that was all that would have mattered. I remembered well how my gentle, devoted father had looked me in the eye and said, "If you ever marry someone who is not Jewish, you'll be dead to me." Dead.

"You'll never be accepted by the *goyim*," he used to tell me. "You're a Jew, and you must stick with your own kind." James came from a big Baptist family that played a vital role in his life. He traveled home to North Carolina every chance he got, and I knew he wanted me to feel that it was home too. I worried for months about how these Gentiles would receive me and how I would feel being around them. Would they accept me, or would I always be "the Jew" who married their brother? These questions did not trouble James in the least. He took enormous pride in his family, particularly in his mother, and assured me they would welcome me and make me feel comfortable.

So in June of 1978 we were married. And that was when I first met Bob.