

1947

**when I was seven years old
I asked my father why
people called seven years
old the age of reason
My father said his fa-
ther had beaten him to**

get him to go to Synagogue when he was little and that when he was seven, he went into a small room in their tenement flat and cut a piece of paper with a scissors, fully believing God would strike him dead for doing work on Saturday. When God did not strike him dead, he never believed in God again. When I was eleven, I asked my father if I could go to Hebrew School to learn Hebrew so I could be bar mitzvaed. I had no idea that the Hebrew School my friends went to did not exactly teach Hebrew but taught how to read a few lines from the Torah to enable even a total dullard to be bar mitzvahed. My father had said, "Go ahead. But don't blame me if you think it's stupid." I went to the Hebrew School. After the first thing the Rabbi said, I stood up, went home, and told my father that the Rabbi was stupid. My father asked me what the stupid Rabbi said. "The Rabbi said, 'The Hebrews left Egypt because it was too hard for them to earn a good

*living there." So
say?" my fath
"I didn't want
him so I just
"They're shee
even k now
is. Th ey d
who t hey
do w hat
else does.
**Hitler fodd
My fa ther***

*what did you
er asked me.
to embarrass
walked out."
p.They don't
what a Jew
on't k now
are. T hey
ever yone
The y're
**er, Ea gle eye,"
said sadly.***

One spring day in 1947 my paternal Grandfather,
 Sani Daniels, sent me a beautiful shining silk blue and white
 and gold tallis, a prayer shawl, in a red velvet bag a gold
 embroidered Star of David on it. My Grandfather insisted in his
 exotic Romanian: Hebrew: Yiddish: English accent that
 I meet him at temple Israel his old Orthodox real time
 Jewish synagogue down in Newark the follow
 ing Saturday morning. My father dropped me
 off at the Synagogue that Saturday morning. I
 walked up the steps to a Synagogue: For the first
 time: I was alone. I felt I was a man. I heard you were
 not supposed to wear a prayer shawl until you were bar mitz
 vahed, but I never believed in rules. I put my prayer shawl over
 my head and shoulders and I kissed the gold embroidered Hebrew
 words, *Baruch Attah Adonai Elohen u, melech ha'olam*, touched
 them to the back of my neck in exactly the same way I saw another
 man doing. I was and I am very proud to be a Jew. And no one
 tells me what to wear or when to wear it or how to talk to my God,
 Or when I should say: Shma Yisroela I Adonai Elohen u Adonai Echad:
 I love the lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul, and all my might
 even if there isn't one. The Synagogue was packed with the real
 time Jewish men in dark suits and hats. They sat quietly. Other
 real time Jewish men in dark suits and hats stood and wailed and
 rocked back and forth. So many wore no hat and had their hair
 on their heads. They wore their traditional
 wool tassels. It all looked like a rock and roll band. The sun
 pra yer shawls wrapped over their heads and wings flying all over the
 place around the black suits. A few men off to the side were
 rocking back and forth at the windows. I was furious. I was angry:
 the incredible tefillin in their minds. I was angry. I was angry:
 could I wear a tefillin? I was angry. I was angry. I was angry.
 Jews. "It's hot. The Jews are in the middle. The Jews are in the middle."

My
 80 year
 old grand
 father, Sani
 Daniels, was born
 Wusan El Chaim ben
 Issak (*Sani Daniil, in Ro
 manian,*) in 1867 in Piatra
 Neamt, Romania, in the eastern
 Transylvania foothills in the absolute
 middle of nowhere deep in mystery prime
 of the veltterhine, and his 71 year old brother, Daniel Daniel, was born Daniel ben Issak, (*Daniil
 Daniil, in Romanian*) in Piatra Neamt in 1876. The *s* at the end of Daniels came from my
 father. He attached the *s* in America when everyone in business kept asking him which
 was his first name Samuel or Daniel. My Grandfather's brother, Daniel Daniel felt
 that if people had difficulty in understanding which Daniel came first in his name
 they were hopeless idiots and so what difference did it make? I found my Grand
 father and his brother Daniel, sitting in the third row from the front with a seat
 saved for me between them. They both smiled and whispered to everyone
 around them in Hebrew, Yiddish, English, and Romanian, "Our Grand son?
 Duvid? The smart one? He's the one? He's the one who is going to earn
 a living with his little finger?" I liked being with my Grandfather and
 his brother. They treated me with a deep respect. I was to get from no one
 else for a long time. Unlike others, what I did was not important to them. They
 taught me to believe that what was important was that I, what I really was, the
 essence of myself, was still alive. The Rabbi looked to me to be fifty to sixty years
 old. He was making a snore or speech in Hebrew. After a few minutes my grand father
 turned to me and said into my ear in his Hebrew:Romanian:Yiddish:English accent, "Duvid?
 Be like a sieve not like a sponge? Don't believe anything he says? He's just a kid? He doesn't
 know anything?" They didn't care if I knew Hebrew or not. They didn't care if I dovened 5 times a
 day. They wanted me to be smart. "They're smart? I realized. 'If they didn't leave Europe we'd be dead.
 They're real Jews. I'm really proud of them."
 At home, my mother grabbed my prayer
 shawl. "I'll hold it for you." she said.
 She mailed it to me a few years before
 she died 48 years later. Life
 has twists and turns. Fate's
 twist makes very tricky
 halvah. In a way you
 might even say?
 That was my
 bar mitz
 vah?
 "