

Wendy Rapaport
High Holidays 2017

REFLECTIONS

*I remember Momma....*My mother-head of our household brought in the holiday by gathering her 3 girls around the counter to light the candles on holders which had been *her* mother's. Hands over her head, she prayed silently. Then her hands circled around the flames with prayers for peace in Israel and gratitude for us. I dwelled in the spell she wove around us, a net of comfort.

Impressive. She created a feeling of safety when my father died. We were 3, 5, and 7. A happy family, we never slept out, didn't drive in the rain, lit shabbos candles and took out our money for the toll booth when we pulled out of the garage. We were ready for anything, only stilled by fears of her ulcer acting up. Not wanting to lose her too, we behaved perfectly.(The beginnings of Jewish guilt...) Years later we learned ulcers were caused by bacteria, not stress, and ironically our behavior actually never mattered to her health.

On high holidays we would walk to the temple, repeating her experience as a child. Ah! the joy of following traditions. We were shvitzing and singing and feeling oh so well dressed in our new clothes and shiny patent leather shoes to honor the holidays.

When we stood up to say kaddish, our synagogue was with us, and that was comforting. Our Jewish Community had our backs.

All through the sermon, we laughed at Rabbi Kronish's jokes, the humor making us receptive to the experience. But then would come what some would call his chutzpah. He asked us to write!! on the holiday to pledge to buy Israel bonds, right there and then. Congregants collected the filled out forms on the spot. You could hear the murmuring of shame...*write on the high holiday!* At the same time, congregants respected his national acclaim for leadership in raising money for Israel.

To me, he gave perspective on doing the right if controversial thing. My doctoral dissertation -- "Humor as a coping mechanism" -- was dedicated to him.

Also profound was the organ and the choir. First the laughter and then the music wrapped itself around our brains, improving our mood and attaching us more deeply to the holiday. Even then I sang along, incorrect words, loud and with great joy, and no, not off key.

My sweetest feeling as a child, which I still carry over, is sitting and holding my mother's hand in the synagogue and now it's my husband Jim's hand. (Don't even go there. I'm sure some of you have married your mothers.) Sitting next to my mother and my sisters, I felt loved and protected in my inner world. Smiling at all the people in the synagogue, I felt the extension of protection to my outer world, my community, my Jewish community, with extra pride and meaning in the anchor of my heritage.

At the end, everyone kissed and expressed appreciation for the extended family feeling of the synagogue. We walked home, laughing and singing, ran into the house, straight to the refrigerator and nibbled the chopped liver on the way to placing it on the table.

The end of a perfect Jewish holiday...