

*This book is dedicated to my Mother
with all of my heart
and to the memory of my Father.*

*Also to Ben, Liana and Adam—
in appreciation, gratitude and with all my love.*

*May we all let go and heal from the turmoil
of our lineages and set ourselves free.*

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FORWARD · David Elliott

*A renowned teacher and healer, David Elliott has helped clients from around the world to heal their deepest fears, blocks and negative beliefs. Reconnecting people with the power of self-love, he shares his gift of clairaudient hearing. He is the author of *The Baptism, Healing and The Reluctant Healer*.*

Randi Maggid (Alix) was raised with a steady stream of the soul-destroying horrors of the Holocaust, as experienced by her mother. After hearing her read at a writers' group that I led, I developed a deep connection to her and an understanding of the events and the players involved in her life, and the effect on families of Holocaust survivors. It was always an adventure when she shared her writing!

Randi also showed up at one of my healing groups and she came to some private sessions, when I found her to be overly fearful. As she explained her family's involvement with the Holocaust, I realized this to be one of the root causes of her fears and her emotional struggle. Through the years I have gotten to know her well and have watched her appetite for growth and evolution flourish. She has worked as hard as anyone I know to deal with her family's heritage and her emotional scars while building a normal life, and that is the fascinating heart of this book.

The book covers a much broader swath of Randi's life than just her mother's lingering memories and, at times, harsh treatment of her daughter. Along with the drama of her upbringing and the challenges of raising her own children, she has injected into her story her lively sense of humor and rich, colorful scenes of an examined life as a mother and wife.

As a healer, writer and artist, I have discovered that one of the most direct routes to healing, especially for highly creative people such as Randi, is to encourage them to express themselves and use their unique gifts. When someone is shut down spiritually or blocking guidance from the spiritual realm, this can be the main cause of illness and unhappiness. Randi's journey and her writing have helped her to become a healed and happy person who enjoys self-love, a spiritual connection and creative expression.

Writing this book has helped her uncover and accept the missing pieces in her life and in her lineage. As she unwinds her story here, her readers will reflect on their own lives and may realize that what happened to their family members generations ago could still be affecting them today.

I have watched Randi wake up and become aware of her gifts and her voice, and I see her as a teacher now, helping people find their way through similar family legacies. The world is a better place by having a person like Randi Maggid in it!

David Elliott
Los Angeles

INTRODUCTION

The waves crashed hard against the pristine sand and six pelicans sailed overhead as I slowed my pace, the daily walking ritual I employed to combat the agony in my body. Gazing at the vast hill behind the beach as it touched the sky, I was uplifted by a euphoric epiphany. I would document the saga of my healing journey, sharing how I opened to creativity and transformed into an empowered and fulfilled woman as I dug my way out of the psychological suffering I had endured, the upbringing from hell—the "Beverly Hills Concentration Camp."

The unaware creator of this saga was my mother, who survived the Nazi death camps only to re-create so much of their essence within our family. While the title is graphic, as hard as I tried to find a different one, none other could more accurately reflect my experience. It's true my experience can never compare with the harsh reality of imprisonment in a concentration camp or with the suffering of any victims of war.

The story begins when I was a little girl in Beverly Hills, California and is told through my memories, my unconscious being the storyteller who reveals my intense private nightmare. My traumas once recalled are released gradually changing me into who I am. In this book I take a risk by showing my truth and accepting the consequences.

The setting is my current life as a wife and mother of two in Los Angeles, my home and the setting where many of my frequent flashbacks (*italicized*) were triggered.

The central message of the book is that people can heal themselves as I did. When I could no longer keep the person inside separate from the one I showed the world, I was forced to make the choice between staying where I was, caged and afraid, or moving forward to grow and heal. I confronted my fear and landed softly, better, stronger and more eager. This breakthrough to freedom feels as though "the world is my oyster." As a close friend

commented, "It's as though the veil has been lifted from your face. Now we can see you!" This book describes the healing paths I followed, those that worked and those that didn't. My success is the result of being open to a variety of alternative healing practices, being diligent in repeating the ones that worked, and the determination to be happy.

The Holocaust survivors' field of influence is vast. I've learned that the negative energies of a trauma suffered by one generation can be passed on to the next. This is called "epigenetic inheritance." In *The Guardian* on Friday August 21, 2015, Helen Thompson wrote, "Genetic changes stemming from the trauma suffered by Holocaust survivors are capable of being passed onto their children, the clearest sign yet that one person's life experience can affect subsequent generations." Based on a genetic study concentrating on 32 Jewish men and women who had been prisoners in Nazi concentration camps, it was discovered that the genes of their children were more likely to have stress disorders compared to other Jews who did not have the same defenselessness. "These gene changes in children could only be attributed to Holocaust exposure in the parents," said Rachel Yehuda, who led the study at Mt. Sinai hospital in New York. There are also studies indicating that this genetic pattern was passed to the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors.

In the healing process, none of us is alone and each of us represents what has not been fully experienced and accepted within our family and history. As I continue in my life's journey after letting go of so much, I hope to no longer be a generational carrier. It ends with me. I am unplugging and changing the trajectory, a relief and a reward for helping create a shift in the lineage. It is not just that I am being healed, but it is also a change in the genetic direction. In fact, the traumas of every generational lineage are many and varied. The universal need for healing is great and offers a vital message of hope for people of all backgrounds.

As a result of the healing work (healing means "becoming whole") I opened psychically, and have visions, perceptions of the past and future, and

can increasingly "read" people. I have found a calling as a healer and writer. Others will find their own different and surprising outcomes, fine-tuning their gifts as they release outmoded and painful ways and use their newfound freedom to blossom into new being-ness.

Healers David Elliott, Hyla Cass, MD, Dr. Donald M. Epstein, Loretta Sparks, LMFT, Dr. Grace Syn, Dr. Ruth Ziemba, Dr. Marie Cavanaugh and others have agreed to have their names in my work. I had many chiropractors, guides, teachers and friends who have helped me learn and develop. Using my discretion, I changed the names, places, occupations and some actual events in this book to protect identities. Any similarities to real people are a coincidence. Using aliases to represent some of the characters made truths easier to express. Interested people can go to my website to find a list of practitioners that I worked with in this book along with further information at www.randimaggid.com or www.beverlyhillsconcentrationcamp.com.

I

The Morning



"Are you okay?" the African American policewoman asked, responding to my emergency call to the Spanish house when I was 15. Attractive and fit, she wore her hair in a high, tight ponytail.

"Yes. I'm okay."

"Any bumps or bruises?"

"No."

"We know about him," she said. "And I understand. Look, as long as you are under eighteen and your brother hasn't hurt you physically, we can't do anything." She cleared her throat and looked me straight in the eye. "As soon as you turn eighteen, you need to get out of here."

Twenty-five years later, light streamed in through the corners of the olive-colored batik curtains. As I squinted away from the mid-morning Los Angeles sun, stretching my body the full length of the bed, I pointed my toes farther than I thought I could before curling into a fetal position. Holding my luscious Egyptian cotton sheets close inside the soothing womb of my bed just a little longer, I languished under the warm duvet. Distant sounds echoed from the den, the life-giving voices of my family waiting for me to get up.

Dreading this day, I stayed in bed longer, tired of old obligations I didn't want to meet as I acted out the scenes of my daily life. "I need my coffee," I thought.

Imagining the Italian stovetop espresso pot sending its aromatic scent throughout the house, I hoisted myself up. Dressed in my favorite happy-face thermal pajamas, I wobbled along the hardwood floor toward the off-white and granite kitchen. I ground Kauai Blue Mountain coffee beans, filling the pot before setting it atop the blue gas flame. Jack entered the kitchen sneaking a quick bear hug from behind. "Good morning," he said. "What a sunny winter day! Aren't you glad we aren't still living in Chicago? It's got to be 20 below there right now," his very words triggering a flashback to before we were married.

Picked up in a black limo from the Ritz Carlton in Chicago, I was driven to the Chicago Furniture and Gift Show located at the convention center where the annual orgy of people showing their merchandise from all over the world was taking place. Looking to sell their wares, sales reps, business owners and creative staffers were meeting to negotiate and buy and sell, while at the same time looking forward to their annual secret hookups—at least that's what I had heard. Notorious for being extra friendly, many of the attendees seemed to have more on their minds than just sales figures. Lucy and I worked grueling hours standing on our feet all day, introducing our furniture lines to the world and trying to sell them to buyers entering our booth. Even though Lucy was the owner's granddaughter, she worked harder than everyone else.

Entertaining retail and wholesale customers in the evenings, we dined at trendy restaurants with one-word names. Monday night we were at Tomato, a refurbished warehouse, along with the entire Urban Function & Impulse team, 108 stores under their corporate belt. Andrea Sarnoff, the vice-president, was a boisterous and funny woman with big, bright red hair who wore heavy blue eye shadow. She spoke with eloquence only after her third martini. She depended on Harvey Ellison, a dark, handsome man with a handlebar moustache, to make

the furniture buys. From time to time I saw Andrea's husband, short, blonde, skinny and fragile, drop by the office dressed in his gym clothes. He always walked out with a white envelope.

"What's in the envelope?" I asked Lucy.

"One can only guess."

Tuesday night we had Northern Italian at the Rose Petal on 5th with Luke and John, two sales reps of one of the largest furniture chains in America. Luke was married, while John was all-American with a strong, hard body, blue eyes and wavy blonde hair. In the powder room Lucy said, "If I was 20 years younger"

"Ha! Guess what, I am 20 years younger," I said, considering the prospect of a night with John. We had a nice time connecting over dinner. I liked him a lot. I hinted I'd like to see him again.

The next night after work I wanted to do something fun with Lucy. Disappointed because she wanted to sleep, I went back to my hotel room, knocked off my heels and grabbed the phone to call Avi, my friend in Los Angeles.

"I'm bored," I said.

"You should call Jack. I gave you his number when you were there last year."

"I don't feel like calling a guy I don't know."

"Call him now!" Avi said. "He'll show you around Chicago. He's a very nice guy."

"How nice?"

"You won't like him like that!"

"Why not? I thought you said he was a nice guy?"

"He's not your type," Avi said. "He's not me."

"Ha, ha! Fine, I'll call him."

I left a message on Jack's answering machine. "Hi, this is Alix. I'm a friend of Avi. I'm staying at the Ritz Carlton on Michigan Avenue. Maybe we can meet."

Calling me back that evening, he was eager.

"Would you like to get together tomorrow night?" Jack asked.

"No, I can't. I'm having dinner with my boss."

"How about Monday?"

"I have clients for dinner."

"Tuesday night?"

"Oh, that's no good either. Actually, it has to be in the morning," I said.

The truth was I wanted to check him out before committing to an entire evening. What if better opportunities arose?

"Meet me at my hotel early for a quick breakfast," I demanded. "It's breakfast or nothing!"

As soon as I hung up, there was a knock at the door. I looked through the peephole. What a surprise! It was John, the adorable sales rep from the night before. Opening the door, I was as giddy as a schoolgirl. Our eyes met seconds before we undressed each other like two kids playing in the park, actors in a scene that seemed all too R rated.

The lights and TV were on as we pounced about the bed, laughing and fumbling. I laid my head on the pillow and looked up at him as he crawled on top of me, entering me sooner than I had expected.

After John left and before I fell asleep, I saw a spirit in my mind's eye, a pirate with long, curly black hair in a loose, white shirt, smiling at me as he stood in a small room lit by candlelight. Since I often saw spirits, the pirate's appearance made me feel so connected and safe that I fell asleep right away, a good thing since Lucy would be knocking on my door early the next morning for work.

Lucy and I were opposites, and a successful, creative team. She modeled herself after Martha Stewart, whereas I was like anyone else. As creative director, I chose the designs that would make a store's new line of furniture or home goods "pop." I was a quiet, curvy, brown-eyed brunette often described as mysterious, while Lucy, the VP of sales, was a tall, green-eyed blonde with pale skin who was as outgoing as she was generous with compliments. Customers

couldn't resist our combination—something for everyone. Our simple system was if both of us loved something I had created, it would blow out of the stores. We were better together than apart.

In the morning, there was a knock at the door. It was Jack, Avi's friend.

"Hi! I took the liberty of ordering us coffee, bagels and berries," I told him. "I don't have a lot of time. Let's sit."

Taking a long look at him, I was surprised. He was tall and lean, wearing a woven scarf of black and white piano keys, a perfect wave of gray on the front of his black hair as though God had applied it with the light stroke of a paintbrush. His dark brown eyes were set behind round gold-rimmed glasses, the kind accountants wear. What made him offbeat was his ponytail, a sign he was also creative—an attractive combination. Standing in front of him I felt his energy, a chill running up my spine and the hairs on the back of my neck standing up. It was as if I had known him all my life, all the parts of us connecting in a way I had never before known.

"I'm going to marry this guy," I thought. "He just doesn't know it yet."

We talked as we ate our breakfast by the window, the Chicago skyline stretched out in front of us. Then I noticed the scar under his left eye. "Is that a tattoo?" I asked.

"Motorcycle accident," Jack recounted. "It happened in the south of France when I was eighteen."

Aroused by this information, I began to perspire and wished I had time to learn more about his wild side. If only my work responsibilities weren't tugging on me. "It's late," I said. "Gotta go. Have a great day."

"You too," Jack said.

The next evening, the Chicago Furniture and Gift Show ended at 6:00 pm. Relaxing in my room later, Lucy was finally ready to have some fun.

"What should we do tonight?" she asked.

"I have Ecstasy," I said.

"What? You're joking!"

“Nope, not joking. Avi gave it to me months ago. I just threw it in my suitcase.”

Staring at each other, we smiled. Lucy pulled a cold split of dry Chardonnay from the mini bar, uncorked it, and poured us two glasses. We swallowed one white tablet each with the wine.

“Let’s go out,” I said.

The cab dropped us off at the Black and White Sardine Bar. Seated at a blue table, we laughed so hard we almost fell off our black leather bar stools. Waves of happiness ran through me, and my skin was super-sensitive. All I wanted to do was touch myself because it felt so amazing. Hugging my chest so I could run my hands over my own arms again and again, I noticed Lucy doing the same. We both laughed hysterically; then, not wanting to cause a scene, we left.

“I’m scared,” Lucy said.

“Everything’s fine, let’s go back to the hotel,” I said. Once we arrived back at the Ritz, we were too energized to sit cooped-up in a hotel room.

“What do we do?” Lucy asked. “What if our customers see us here in the lobby laughing like this?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll call Jack, Avi’s friend. He’ll take care of us.” I phoned Jack from the lobby.

“Hi Jack, this is Alix.”

“Oh hi, Alix! What’s going on?”

“Uh, my girlfriend and I just took some Ecstasy. Do you think you could come over?”

Jack’s dream had just come true. “I’ll be right there,” he said.

“Meet us in the lobby near the fountain.”

As we waited for Jack, Lucy stared at the large circular light fixture above the fountain, a caravan of gold horse and carriages.

“They’re moving,” she said. “The horses up there are going fast.”

Lucy’s head was moving in circles as if she were following a race at the track. When Jack entered the lobby, he noticed Lucy staring up. “What’s she doing?”

"Watching the horses run," I said.

"Oh god, we'd better go," he laughed.

Once outside, we were relieved. Jack hailed a cab.

"Where to?" the cab driver asked.

"Kingston Mines," Jack replied.

Walking into the blues club, we blended into the dancing crowd until we found seats at a table in front of the band. The club smelled like smoke mixed with beer and burgers, a non-appetizing scent, the Ecstasy having made my stomach muscles tight. Laughing and smiling, we were having a great time, the hours seeming like minutes. The lead singer turned away from us and had a chat with his band. Turning back around, he looked at Lucy and said into his microphone, "The band and I are wondering what you are thinking about."

Lucy turned red while the audience laughed, and the band continued to play, intermittently flirting with Lucy. Hungry as the Ecstasy wore off, we had beer, cheeseburgers and fries with lots of catsup.

"Let's go to The Green Mill next," Jack suggested as we rode away in a cab.

Once inside The Green Mill, Jack pointed out all the secret rooms where Al Capone and his mafia friends used to hang out. It was a small and elegant jazz club, with green velvet curtains and white tablecloths. We listened to music while polishing off a bottle of Cabernet and a fruit and cheese plate. Afterward, Jack escorted us back to the Ritz, gave us hugs and watched Lucy and me take the elevator up.

The next morning I almost didn't recognize myself, sticky, sickly and pale, drained of life, my cheeks sore from all the smiling. How could I have smiled so much last night and feel so terrible today? Getting back into bed, I slept until 4:00 pm when Jack called.

"How about staying for the weekend?" he asked.

After changing my flight I took a cab to the Michigan Grand, the Art Deco-style high-rise where Jack lived. The large silver elevator was filled with stylish executives coming back from work; their scent was a mélange of colognes and

perfumes making my nostrils itch as I ascended to the fortieth floor.

Jack greeted me at the door and said, "Hi! Come in and relax while I get dinner ready."

I sat on the couch and kicked off my shoes. Jack brought out two wine glasses and placed them on the dining table. He pulled open the shades to reveal an expansive city view. As I stared out, Jack uncorked a bottle of Merlot.

"Something smells amazing," I noticed.

"It's my homemade Bolognese sauce."

Jack disappeared into the kitchen. The sounds of pots and pans and dishes clanking made me hungrier. Comfortable as if I were at home, I relished the moment. "Nice that he cooks," I thought. "I certainly can't!"

"Sit down," he said as he filled our wine glasses.

He went back into the kitchen and came out carrying two steaming bowls of spaghetti Bolognese and set them on the table. We ate enjoying every bite, a most romantic night with everything fitting together just right.

As I finished my second espresso, the flashback faded and my hungry family wanted breakfast.

I cooked up bacon and eggs for Jack, Lola, Aidan and myself. Aidan just seven and a half years old was melancholy after yesterday's fishing trip with our neighbor Barry's family. He had walked through the door with a mischievous smile on his sunburnt face and his chestnut hair was a mess. "Look! I caught a fish!" He filled the bathtub with water thinking that's what we do with the fish we catch. We play with it. But, when he went into the kitchen to retrieve the fish he saw Jack cleaning it in the sink! Aidan was destroyed. Hearing him sob, Lola, ten years old, compact and strong, walked out of her bedroom wearing a pink tutu, colorful sparkly make-up and a princess tiara atop her long brown hair. She teetered between consoling Aidan and making fun of him, pushing his buttons as she saw fit. "Come on...you knew we were going to eat that fish, didn't you?" she coaxed with a smile.

Aidan turned red with anger before yelling at the top of his lungs, “I did not! I even named my fish Finneas!”

“Dad told you to throw it back in the ocean! You threw the first fish back,” Lola badgered.

As Aidan’s tears flowed, Lola knew she had gone too far. “I’m sorry about your fish,” she said, and she gave Aidan a big hug.

When we all sat down to dinner, a grilled Finneas was presented on a white oval plate accented by lemon wedges in the center of the wood table. As Aidan chewed, he felt a weird combination of delight and remorse realizing he was at the top of the food chain.

The next morning there was little discussion of Finneas’s demise. Aidan seemed to have recovered. After breakfast, we loaded ourselves into the SUV. The day was bright, sunny and breezy as I glanced up at the blue sky, breathing in the sharp aroma of the tall eucalyptus trees. It was just a short walk down to the beach, the place I loved most. My rustic neighborhood was safe for me because it was far enough from Beverly Hills where I grew up, and just a forty-minute drive to visit my mother in Los Angeles. Contemplating this trip, I sat in the driver’s seat with a heavy heart.

“Do we have everything?” I yelled. “Did everyone bring a snack? Lola! Did you let the dog out to pee?”

“Yes, Mom!”

Everything seemed okay, but inside I was uneasy. My emotions swelled, and I remained clueless as to what to do about it. So, taking a deep breath, I buried them. Turning on the ignition, I headed away from the beach. As I drove, crows, squirrels and dogs were arranged beautifully within the neighborhoods as though God had just doodled them in with colored pencils.

As I entered the freeway, Jack, sitting in the passenger seat, was pointing to the left, his thumb cocked back as if he were shooting a revolver— his way of signaling me toward the carpool lane.

I said, “I do know where the carpool lane is, Jack.”

Jack's shenanigans reminded me of one of our many long-distance phone calls, this one when I was on a business trip in Paris. As I think back, Jack was persuasive.

"Move in with me!" he said.

"What?"

"I want you to move in with me."

"We just met! Let me have time to think."

Jack sent me plane tickets to Chicago and came to California often. For the first time in a decade, I asked my mother for her opinion.

"I like a guy who lives so far away. He wants me to move there. What should I do?"

"Tek a chanz," she said. "Vat du u hev to looz?"

Securing a new job with a furniture company in Chicago, I moved in with Jack. Working and living in the city for two years was totally exciting, especially since Jack had many diverse friends and colleagues. He met people easily, and could change his accent to match where a person was from, speaking with a polished Boston or New York inflection. Having spent some time in Israel during his youth, his Israeli accent and knowledge of Hebrew were perfect. I even wondered if he was a Mossad agent since he traveled so much. We married a year later when I was 30 and Jack was 31.

When Yitzhak Rabin became Prime Minister and signed a peace agreement with Jordan, Jack thought it was a good time to move to Israel and persuaded me to move there. Up for an adventure, I quit my job and packed my bags. Lola and Aidan were both born in Jerusalem. Having kids in Israel was exquisite, since everyone cherished pregnant women, treating them like royalty.

Missing the California lifestyle, eventually I persuaded Jack to move. We settled near the beach where upon I had my mid-life crisis at 40, a time of coming to terms with the fact that no matter how much I exercised, my twenty-five-year-old body was gone for good.

In the car, Jack cued up the Abbey Road CD from his music compilation, declaring “Aidan and Lola need to recognize the Beatles’ greatest hits, otherwise what kind of parents would we be?”

Jack sang out loud, “Here comes the sun . . . da da da da. Here comes the sun.”

“I am not enjoying this,” I thought. My head felt like two large cymbals were smashing my ears together. I tried to block out the music while tuning into the kids’ backseat conversation.

“Mom? What happened to the Beatles?” Aidan yelled.

“How did John Lennon die?” Lola squawked.

They asked questions quicker than I could spew answers. Suddenly, a ball hit me in the back of the head.

My eyes on the road, I became aware I was responsible for everyone in the car, everyone out of the car, and my mother who was not even near the car. “Okay, I am handling this. No problem juggling it all,” I thought.

I felt in control and yet I had an unexplainable energy in my psyche creating an uncomfortable, chaotic stew. My back stiffened with determination as the volume inside the car seemed louder. “Octopus’s Garden” reverberated through my ears, throbbing in my head. As if I were a castle made of cards, if the wind blew the wrong way, I thought I could lose it.

Exiting the freeway, gazing left as I made a left turn onto Robertson Boulevard, I felt a shift in my neck—a loud popping sound as though something had snapped. “Ouch!”

Needle-like pains scattered through my head like bullets firing from machine guns. My body went limp. The street melted into a muted grayish-brown until everything went black.

“Wake up! Wake up!” Jack screamed. Opening my eyes, I saw the steering wheel spinning away. Heading toward the back of a red Budweiser truck, I straightened the wheel with a firm grip.

“Hit the brakes!” Jack yelled.

Sitting up and forcing my foot down hard, I stopped an inch away from impact. Tears streamed from my eyes as I rubbed the left side of my neck.

“Are you okay?” Jack asked.

“I don’t know.”

As I turned my head gingerly back and forth, the pain dissipated. I continued on my way.

When we reached my mother’s apartment building, we found her sitting on a gray wooden bench in the garden. The black, beige and mustard façade of the building loomed upward behind her like a hovering mechanical bumblebee reminiscent of the Kaiju films that show a monster attacking a major Japanese city.

Dressed casually in black pants, a pale yellow short-sleeved cotton shirt and comfortable white orthopedic shoes, my mother at 82 was oddly color-coordinated with the building behind her. Her hair was short and simple. She had no extraneous accessories like a hat, sunglasses or even a purse; a pant pocket was all she needed to carry her keys and folded-up dollar bills. There was an air of ease about her as if she were Dorothy Hamill about to free-form ice skate around the garden before moving into an impressive pirouette.

Cautious of her brittle hip, my mother held tight to the door handle as she climbed into the car with a grunt. We drove on Fairfax toward Canter’s deli, and pulled into the parking lot, which was lined with dark gray pigeons that seemed to be standing in line for leftovers. We walked past the black and white mural of Jewish life in America, 1841 to 1985, painted on the side of the building. Appreciating the landmark artwork, I looked down at the old, grayish chewing gum stuck to the sidewalk. As I thought about how long that gum had been there, my mind riffled back over thirty years to when my mother ran things.

Taking on new responsibilities, my mother managed rental units. Often on

the weekend when she had appointments, my mother left me at home with Billy, twelve years my senior. Billy was tall and slender, dirty blonde curls falling past his shoulders. Popular, he had a sweet face and hazel eyes. Captain of the Beverly High basketball team, he was popular with the girls while pushing decent grades. One day when I was about seven my mother stopped letting Billy watch me. Never explaining why, she now forced me to spend drawn-out afternoons in silence, tagging along behind her.

Arriving in front of an apartment building an hour early one morning, my mother and I waited in the car. Four hours went by. We didn't talk much. Breaking the monotony, I played on a nearby lawn and jumped over the cracks in the sidewalk until my stomach began to ache.

"I'm hungry," I said.

"You hev to wait."

"Why?"

"Somevon iz comink," she said, "To see de apartment. I hev to open de door."

"Can't you call and see why he's so late?"

"No."

"I'm starving . . . can we get something to eat, please?"

"Wait here," she said. "Maybe he will com."

I watched my mother leave and walk up the street toward the bustling boulevard, wishing she had taken me with her. Uneasy about being left alone waiting for a stranger, I had a sinking feeling in my stomach. Never had I gotten used to this loneliness that made me wonder why I had ever been born. Sitting very still, tears falling behind my thick brown bifocals, I stared down at my white tights tucked into my black patent leather shoes. That day I wore a heavy jumper over a long-sleeved turtleneck, an outfit much too warm for a day spent in a hot car.

"I wish I had someone to play with," I thought. "I wish I had a daddy."

Returning to the car, my mother handed me a brown paper bag. Relieved I was about to eat, I licked my lips and reached into the bag. Touching something

cold and round, I pulled out a light green head of cabbage.

“Cabbage?” I asked. “You brought me a cabbage?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t eat this!” I yelled. “Kids don’t like cabbage, especially not raw cabbage!”

“Datz vat dere iz,” she said.

Having not eaten all day, I gnawed at the cabbage like a hungry rabbit, ignoring its putrid flavor. My mother stared with sadistic satisfaction, understanding she was the only one who could set me free. Spending the next few hours stuck in the car with my cabbage head, I thought about what it would be like to be eating a hot, gooey slice of cheese pizza.

The neighborhood around Canter’s had changed since my mother moved there fifteen years ago. New restaurants, art galleries and hip clothing stores replaced some of the older Jewish establishments. The street was in transition, a fact that made me feel old. Pushing through the heavy glass and metal door into the deli, I smelled dill pickles, salted meats and assorted baked goods. It was as though the white-gloved hand in the old Warner Brothers cartoons had tapped me on the shoulder, leading me to the freshly baked apple pie cooling on the windowsill. We stood in the midst of a *mélange* of smells, voices and people, the restaurant so crowded it was as if we were at the airport trying to find our gate on Thanksgiving, the busiest flying day of the year.

I sensed my mother’s nervous energy shift to high. Waiting in line for food was unbearable to her. Gone were the days when she had to wait for a bowl of sawdust water with a potato peel, her daily meal in Auschwitz.

When I was younger, she would ignore the restaurant hostess and bolt past her with me in tow, choosing the best booth and sitting down. Not understanding the role of a hostess, my mother treated her as if she were invisible. When I was lucky, the hostess would ignore the situation. When I wasn’t so lucky, she would run after us, making a scene.

The Canter's hostess wore blue stretch pants with orange Crocs and white tube socks. Over her pants she wore an extra-large T-shirt with an image of a woman's face taking a big bite out of an oversized pastrami sandwich. "Come this way," she said.

We followed her to a corner booth with mauve, faux-leather seats and a brown Formica table. A waitress with short black hair appeared, tossing a plate of bagel chips as if she were throwing dice at a craps table. "I'm Shirley," she said with a low, raspy voice, an obvious tell of a smoker. As she deciphered her order pad through her tiny gold metal reading glasses, she clicked the top of her pen, gripping it with the expertise of a welder.

"Soup to start, honey?"

"Chicken soup with rice for everyone, please," I said.

Jack added, "And I'll have the complete Thanksgiving dinner."

"I'll bring some pickles," Shirley said.

Lola and Aidan slurped the chicken soup as though it connected them to the rest of the universe—the glue that binds us. As I watched my mother survey the lunch orders, I sucked in my resentment toward her, my anxiety hidden beneath a smile.

As I ate lunch, I stared at my mother and began to daydream, seeing myself many years earlier at Nate 'n Al's, a deli in Beverly Hills, my hometown.

Sitting in a booth facing my mother, I was eight years old. I was sad, having said the wrong thing to a classmate who no longer wanted to be my friend. Wishing that someone in my family could explain how to behave, I made mistakes, learning by trial and error with no one to guide me.

"Mom, what should I be when I grow up?"

She looked at me in a familiar way. She had honed an expression over the years that encompassed intelligence and concern, her face still and serious, her dark eyes staring straight. She drew me in and gave me hope of an oncoming omnipotent answer. Unfortunately, the expression was only a shell; like a large hollow chocolate turkey, you bite into the chocolate expecting something exquisite,

and instead you get bupkis.

“Mom, what do think I should be when I grow up?” I asked again.

“Vat iz you takin’ for d’lunch?” she asked.

“You never answer me! Why do you always change the subject?”

My words bounced back like the red rubber handball I played with at recess. It didn’t matter how hard I hit the handball because it always came back with the same force. If only my mother were like the Zoltan fortune-telling machine in the movie “Big,” I would put in a dollar and have my mother’s head light up before telling me everything I needed to know about life. With my luck, the machine wouldn’t work. I’d kick it over and over again until my foot broke.

“Vat is you takin for d’lunch?” she asked again.

“Beef dip on a Kaiser roll with au jus,” I replied.

I struggled with food most of my life, unable to discriminate meals from snacks and healthy from junk.

“Da stomak dozin know vat time it iz,” my mother would always say as she tried to serve me another meal too soon after I had already eaten. Plates of food were available, left out on the breakfast or dining room table so that I could pick at it all day long.

My life revolved around food, the only subject my mother wanted to discuss, creating my love/hate relationship with it. If I was lonely, I had the cake. If I was sad, I had the pastrami. If I earned good grades, I had the pastry. If I earned bad grades, I had more pastry. If I ate a lot, I was good girl. If I didn’t, I was rebellious. If I went on a diet, I was a problem child.

Offering a serious nod, my mother approved when I ordered a glutinous, sugary, high-cholesterol meal at any deli: pastrami on rye with French fries, Dr. Brown’s black cherry soda and a slice of my favorite chocolate mocha seven-layer cake. Conflicted because I wanted approval for me, not just for what I ate, I compartmentalized that disappointment, and my mother, apparently, was never aware anything was wrong. The price tag of overeating

for this approval was becoming fat.

My mother always enjoyed watching me eat, until a certain point when her face changed to a long stare, her breath exhaling into a long sigh. At that point, she was no longer with me, but with them, her family that had been killed in the Holocaust. When I thought of her in striped pajamas, skinny, eyes bugged out like the victims in the documentaries, I tensed, unable to comprehend the reality, my mind often blocking it out unwilling to consider what she saw, what was done to her, or the reasons the Nazis chose to keep her alive.

The one spared from death in her immediate family, she had worked in an ammunition factory that made bullets used to kill her own people. She was unaware of what was happening outside the gates while she was inside Auschwitz. Her survivor guilt manifested itself as selflessness, not wanting to spend money because she was worthless. Treated as though she were less than a dog during WWII, she believed it.

Being awoken and marched outside naked in the snow until someone dropped dead was a nightly occurrence, along with prisoners forced to hold their arms up. Whoever dropped his arms first was shot. Only then could they go back to sleep. This horror created something foreign in my mother, a parasite that feeds on negative beliefs causing fear and depression. In my own processing, I wondered why my mother had no physical reminder of this past, the tattoo branded into every prisoner's skin.

“Mom, why don't you have a number on your arm?”

“I dunno,” she said.

She skimmed on the information she would divulge. She either blocked it out or was unable to express it. Did she receive special treatment? Was she a domestic slave for a commandant? Was she destined for the gas chamber and then the war ended?

Understandably, everything she remembered before the war was perfection. Anything after the war was stale chopped liver and leftovers, including me.

Grinds at the bottom of the coffee mug, soon to become compost, not good enough to drink. “How could she possibly love me if I feel this way?”

“Look at my report card!” I said proudly. “Almost all A’s.”

My mother was silent.

“Aren’t you glad?” I asked.

“You did dat for yerself, not for me.”

“I thought you would be happy. Some of my friends get \$50 for each A.”

“I don ker vat dey do.”

“You don’t care how I do in school?”

“No.”

Shirley, the waitress, placed the Canter’s check on the table after I had finished off the meal with a second cup of coffee. After the bill was paid, I drove the family to Pacific Park where the kids climbed “dinosaur” rocks and rode Razor scooters. The tall grass cooled my bare feet as a breeze blew over me while I appreciated the moment, and thanked the universe for allowing me to be so fortunate as to afford Lola and Aidan the luxury of just being children.

Marveling at their pure spirits, I wanted to give them everything I had lacked growing up. Acting as a filter between them and the world, I saw my role as a gauge that regulated the flow of information, allowing the “good” to enter when my mother was warm and generous, while preventing the “bad” when my mother’s strange behavior and traumatic memories could be triggered.

We went to my mother’s house after the park, where I organized her pillbox and surveyed the refrigerator to make sure she had food. Taking care of my children while taking care of my mother was difficult to balance, giving them all I could while allowing their independence. I was conscious of the family dynamic at all times, paying special attention to mood changes and

shifts in energy. When something seemed off, I packed up the kids and went home.

My mother's living room couch was brought over from the Spanish house when she moved. As I relaxed on the couch, I remembered its original color was royal blue velvet when it was purchased in the 1960s from Glabman's, the "in" furniture store back in the day. The couch made a grand and stylish statement and remained the focus of my mother's living room, even in its reupholstered sage green. Lola disappeared into the bedroom.

"Look what I found!"

She had discovered a photo album in the antique nightstand. Her big brown eyes filled with anticipation as she plopped down next to me, with an eagerness that made me cringe. The prospect of looking at old family photos was torture because considering the future was what had so far kept me sane. Lola balanced the photo album on her thighs with bent knees, her bare feet flat on the couch cushion as she leaned back.

"I'll turn the pages," she said.

As I watched her view the past, my forehead perspired more with each turn of every cardboard page. "How would Lola ever understand?" I thought. If only I had a magic wand to change my history, I would present her with a different story.

"Look Mom," Lola said, "You are smiling here. Mommy, look how cute and little you are!"

Lola was delighted as if she had just opened a fresh box of See's chocolates, the sweet scent begging for indulgence. She was enthusiastic about me. Someone caring about my life was not a common occurrence. Life was always about someone else.

"Wow, look at your brother!" Lola said. "He's so much older than you!"

"Yes he is," I answered. Anxiety rose within me as I swallowed it down.

Chin creeping forward, I peered over the edge of the album. Allan, my oldest brother, sixteen years older than me, was standing proudly with his

waist-length brown hair and a toothy grin. He was a boisterous, large man with a presence that couldn't be ignored. Remembering that time in 1972 when I was eight, I was thrilled he was visiting from university. He played, tickled and spun me around. On that visit, he brought home a dog, a black lab and Irish setter mix.

"Wow, a dog!"

"He is for you," Allan said.

"Me?"

"I can't take care of a dog," he said.

"What's his name?"

"Munkuss."

"Munkuss? What kind of a name is that?"

After a moment of silence, Allan cleared his throat. "Munkuss was named after an American Indian Chief," he said.

"Really? An Indian Chief?"

It was as though the Queen of England had knighted that black hairy dog. Believing Allan, I never considered he might be making up the story.

Lola giggled as she continued viewing earlier photos of me at six years old, jumping on the grass in front of a white plastic bathtub wearing only a blue sailor hat with white trim. "Where were my clothes?" I wondered.

Bothered my being so exposed was "cute," I was uneasy in a way I couldn't quite understand. "Lola, it's time to go," I said.

Lola went back into the bedroom to return the photo album to the antique nightstand. Following behind her, I sat down on the round magenta velvet loveseat in the corner of the room. After a few seconds, my mind went back in time, the room expanding until I saw the same loveseat in the Spanish house.

Through an open window, I could see the large leafy tree. Scanning to

the right, I saw myself rummaging, like Lola had, through that same wooden nightstand. Kneeling down on the beige carpet, I looked through my mother's old papers and memorabilia. Noticing a small black and white photo of my father, I picked it up and placed it flat in the palm of my hand like a tiny diamond. Taking a long look, I scrutinized his handsome face and remembered his bright blue eyes as if the photo had been in color. Tears brimmed over in my eyes as I remembered the doctor in the long white coat at the hospital looking down at me when I was four and a half years old. "Your dad won't be coming back for a long time," he said.

Taking the doctor's words literally, I waited for my father for a long time. Imagining him pulling up the driveway and then into the garage, I waited outside every evening until dark. "When is daddy coming home?" I asked.

"I dunno, maybe zoon," my mother answered.

The moment I saw the little black and white photo when I was eight, I became conscious my daddy was dead, my chest caving in as my life changed forever. Loss and betrayal soaked into my tiny heart from the shock that my father had died in 1969, and my family watched me wait for him until 1972. Maybe my mother didn't know any other way to deal with my loss. No one had explained to her that her family had been killed while she was waiting for them to save her in Auschwitz.

Exhausted, we drove home from my mother's, looking forward to Bone, our Beagle waiting by the door leading us to the treat drawer, followed by a pizza delivery, and kicking back in front of the TV.

As we pulled into the driveway, I noticed our garage door was worn and needing a new coat of paint.

Out of habit, I hung out by the garage waiting for my father to return. Reddish-brown storage spaces lined the interior, scattered cobwebs stuck to the corners. Designed to keep things from falling, wire was strung across the

sidewalls. When my father was alive, the garage was filled with toys, beach chairs, bicycles, tools, paint cans and footstools. One day sometime after I had discovered he had passed, the electric garage door opener stopped working. Never repaired, the garage door had to be opened and closed manually, and then, the door broke off its right hinge. Struggling for years to stay connected to that one hinge, the door finally collapsed.

“For vat do ve neet a new garashe dor?” my mother asked.

“Because everyone can see our stuff.”

“Forgit aboudit!”

I didn't understand why she was so stubborn about something that she could easily have fixed. Within weeks, everything in the garage was stolen right down to the slippery oil stains on the cement floor. Stripped down to its bare bones, the garage was now a vessel used only for my mother and brothers to drive in and out.

“Vat ken you do?” my mother said. “Dis iz da laben.” (This is life.)

Her voice trailed off as though it was easier to die than to call a repairman.

The antithesis of the garage was the adjacent flower-filled, sunlit street, which reminded me happiness might still exist outside our house.

Did you ever drive down a well-kept street and see that one house? It catches your eye because it must have been lovely in its heyday, but now has overgrown bushes and a dried-up lawn. Trees and plants, dead and alive, were woven together, covering the stained glass windows and decorative wrought iron railings. As the years went by, our “90210” address became more like that broken garage door—an eyesore, too weak to go on.

Soon after the garage door fell, my mother drove her car the wrong way down a one-way street in the middle of the Beverly Hills. Afraid to try again, she gave up driving. She also stopped getting her hair done properly, cutting it herself, short and uneven with dull scissors, a walking billboard that read, “Something happened to me.”

“You look like a lesbian,” Billy said. “Why did you cut your hair so short?”

“I like it dis way,” she said. Billy sounded like a parent to my mother that day, her behavior sometimes that of a stubborn child, a part of her having never grown up.

“Jack, let’s get a repair man to make sure the garage door is working properly. Maybe you can give it a new coat of paint?”

“Sure.”

“Goodnight everyone,” I said. “I’ve had it.” Kissing everyone on the forehead, I went to bed.

The next morning, I woke up with a sharp pain that scared the hell out of me.

“Jack!” I cried.

“Yeah.”

“Something is wrong.”