
Israel

After Mama died I couldn't live at home anymore. Papa, who was near hysteria, blamed me for her death. He said if I hadn't gone to Israel she wouldn't have died. Because I caused her so much trauma.

Mama's death was more than he could bear. In his grief Papa decided to go to Israel himself. "I must see the country I always dreamed about. I'll come back when I feel better," he said.

That fall I returned to Brooklyn College, but my mind was in a haze. I had lost my mother. And now I feared I was losing my father. Marty, meanwhile, had gone to Berkeley, California, to attend graduate school. At a loss for what to do, I joined him. But I wasn't ready for a serious commitment. After three months I broke off our engagement and returned to New York.

To my shock, Papa returned from Israel with a wife. My fear of losing him had been realized. I felt abandoned. Lillian Kaplan, a psychiatrist who specialized in treating Holocaust survivors, suggested I move into a boardinghouse in Brooklyn, the Girls Club. It was a home for Jewish girls who had no place to live. Many had gone through personal traumas themselves, and I felt comfortable there. Slowly and painfully, with Dr. Kaplan's guidance, I began to unravel my Auschwitz experience. For the next three years, the club was my home.

In 1960 I graduated from Brooklyn College with a major in psychology. Meanwhile, Maier Friedman, the boy from the Hebrew school, had come

back into my life. He had already finished his bachelor's degree at Cooper Union and was getting a master's in chemical engineering at MIT. I fell in love with him all over again, and we got married on June 11, 1960, a week after I graduated. I was twenty-one; he was twenty-two.

One of my attractions to Maier had been his love for Israel. As teenagers, we had seen each other every week at the Zionist club, Habonim. For years we talked about moving to Israel. After we were married and had two children, we knew that that was where we wanted to live. Two days after Maier got his Ph.D. and I my master's degree, we headed to the airport, stopping to pick up our laundry on the way.

It was April 1967, nineteen years after Israel had won its independence. But the Arab world refused to accept Israel's existence on the soil of Palestine. Papa implored us not to go. "How can you do this to my grandchildren?" he cried. But we knew we had to be where Jews were in trouble.

When the first air-raid siren sounded at dawn on June 5, I thought it was another drill. But this was no drill. Within minutes jets screamed overhead and we heard bombs exploding. Oh God! I thought. Please . . . please! Maier and I grabbed the children and ran for the trenches. Invading German planes flashed into my mind and then cattle cars with hundreds, thousands, of people getting off and red smoke and SS guards holding back barking dogs . . . and then I saw myself standing naked in line to have my number tattooed. It was like a surrealist dream, a terrible fantasy that was coming to life from a tomb inside my brain.

In six days the war was over. All around us, people burst into celebration. Blue-and-white flags fluttered from poles, from auto aerials, from balconies overlooking the streets. For the first time in my life, I felt like a victor instead of a victim.

The next day we drove into the Old City of Jerusalem. For nineteen hundred years the Western Wall, the last remnant of the Second Temple, had been our symbol of hope and despair. But I knew now that God was with us, that the God of Israel had come down to us and said, "I am your God, and you are my people."

Overnight, my terror had turned into euphoria. When I approached the Wall, my heart pounded with awe. I felt my legs float out from under me. But instead of marching with the children to the crematorium, I was walking with my family toward the Wall.

I felt at peace and at home.