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A treasured family heirloom, a Torah scroll that had been commissioned by my great great grandmother in Poland, used and kept kosher for use, and kept safe for five generations, was recently discovered to be missing from the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem. It was that synagogue to whom my grandmother, my Safta Rachel, an orthodox Jew, zealous Zionist, and a Holocaust survivor, entrusted the Torah's care and safekeeping. In thinking about my Jewish identity for today's *drash* I realized it is wrapped up in the existence of that object and its consequent recent loss. I have felt like some part of what made who I am has been gouged out and taken away.

Rachel and her father had hidden the Torah in some barn rafters in a small Polish village early in the war, and after losing her parents and many of her siblings, her first husband and their infant daughter, she returned to that barn before the war's end to reclaim it. She and the man who would become my grandfather carried the Torah through a ravaged, starving Europe to a Displaced Persons camp in Italy, then to America (Los Angeles, where they would raise their twin daughters), and then finally to Jerusalem in the early 1980s. My parents and my brother and I traveled to Israel when I was nine so my brother could chant his Bar Mitzvah torah portion from Safta's torah scroll.

Rachel died in 2010 and only immediately after her death did we discover the Torah to be missing. With the help of an Israeli *sopher* (scribe) who has worked with Yad Vashem to preserve their collection of Torahs rescued from the Holocaust, the painstaking process of searching every possible likely (and unlikely) place in the Great Synagogue including closets and basement storage areas where that Torah might have been placed was finally completed this year. The conclusion? The Torah is not there.

It turns out there is an active black market for items like these: treasures that are beyond value to some, but signify mere dollar signs to others. How did so many generations of my family miss the memo about rife corruption amongst the Israeli clergy? I don't have a good answer for that.

When I was growing up the values in my home and community were pretty explicit. Jews are good, Israel's good. Trust Jews, trust Israel. Here's an example: I remember a pre-teen event organized by our conservative synagogue in Tucson, AZ where my parents were active members. This Sunday afternoon program was slightly odd combination of current events education about Operation Moses – the airlifting of thousands of Ethiopian Jews to Israel that was happening at that time – and a sort of

indoctrination exercise that included information about the escalating rates of intermarriage in the U.S., all with the take-home message that: every Jewish life is precious, Israel is heroic, and our people will cease to exist unless each and every one of us in the room that day eventually married a Jew. Subtle it was not.

Where did my mind wander? A giant El Al plane makes a unprecedented landing not in the Sudanese desert but instead in a Polish forest in a freezing winter in, say, 1944, and hundreds or thousands of Jewish families, weary and emaciated, huddle together on board, among them my grandparents holding the Torah, along with their parents, brothers and sisters, all of them alive and hopeful. The plane ascends, headed in the direction of a warm and sunny Israel, which wasn't yet Israel, and the fantasy fades.

The daydream had no logic - just a 12 year old trying to reconcile past and present, maybe grasping for an instant the significance of the extraordinary event transpiring across the globe by couching it in something more familiar.

That was always a dilemma for me: the imperative to bear witness, with the competing impulse to daydream the whole horrible thing away. This unique heritage - being the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor - turns out to be both a privilege and a tremendous weight.

My grandmother was educated, dignified, proud, adoring, and notably silent on all my inquiries related to the war. She was happy to speak of her home near a river and an orchard in the small town of Byten, and about her father, the town Rabbi, and how he led lengthy discussions about the weekly Parsha at the Shabbat lunch table. But questions from me, as I got older, about what happened when the Nazis came...those questions were met with painful, purposeful silence, and now looking back I see those silences as heavy bricks she gave to me, with which to build something.

I'm still figuring out what to build.

One thing I've tried to build is a Jewish home in a Jewish community. I doubt it's attributable to that lecture I got back when I was twelve with the dismal statistics about the dwindling Jewish population, but I did end up marrying a wonderful Jewish man with whom I have two sons. Those boys are comfortable running around in these halls and at least one of them enjoys listening to the Camp Kee Tov CD on the "endless repeat" setting. You may laugh at this, but when I think back on what formed my Jewish identity, songs and music feature very prominently. Maybe - taking in all the melodies, singing in a group, was (is) a way for me to counter some of the weight of the past with some lightness, some vitality. I attended Camp Ramah for six summers, and we could, if very

lucky, take home a cassette tape with a scratchy recording of our song leader Andy singing many many of those beloved camp songs, accompanied only by his accordion. I think I listened to that tape until it actually melted.

I'm starting to see that whatever else I might build with those heavy bricks Rachel gave me won't necessarily be something triumphant or tidy. However many joyous melodic songs we sing, and even our prayers, won't bring her rescued Torah back to us. Lately I've imagined using those bricks to build a tunnel that I could crawl through and reach her, so I could tell her Safta, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry we don't have your Torah anymore. It was testimony to your faith, your strength, your unimaginable determination. Knowing it was there gave me something to hold on to from you, from your family, from your life, so much of which was blotted out by darkness. But I do have your story, its story, and I'll tell it out loud to whoever will listen.

So thank you everyone for listening.