

MEMORIES ABOUT OUR JEWISH IDENTITY—AND RELATED THOUGHTS

For our family, through the generations

—from Iris, with love

“As a writer, I’m more interested in what people tell themselves happened rather than what actually happened.”

—Kazuo Ishiguru

These memories are inspired by Maya’s request to write about experiences our family and I have had that are related to Jewish culture and religion. I thought initially I wouldn’t have a lot to say. After all, we have never been observant in a religious sense. But as I began to write, I realized how many of my interests and beliefs have been influenced by my experience of being Jewish.

I am thankful to Maya for starting me on this project, which has brought back so many memories I might never have thought of again.

I am writing this for all of my descendants who might find it of interest. It is intended to be read along with the bio of my childhood, which contains a more comprehensive overview of my experiences and those of my parents and friends at that time.

The first section of this discussion is loosely organized by family member. I say loosely because at times in describing an individual I am reminded of a broader topic and I take a detour to discuss that topic, as I would in a conversation or oral history. So, for example, the discussion of my grandmother, Lena, becomes a description of the vacation resorts of my childhood. The discussion of my grandfather, Abraham, evolves into commentary on Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. (If my students read this

they would remind me that it contradicts all the advice about pristine organization I have given them over the years!)

The second section of this discussion is organized by a series of events at various times in my life, mostly as an adult, and often with Gene. Most are connected to Jewish culture and religion, but in some cases I discuss other events to give context—or just because I enjoy talking about them.

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MY FAMILY

Mother: Golda Shuman Comens

Yes, she was called Golda—not Goldie, which she had a strong aversion to. Her namesake, Golda Meir, was president of Israel from 1969 to 1974.

I have no recollections about my mother's views on Judaism except as she strove to please my grandmother by buying kosher food and speaking to her in Yiddish (although my grandmother was fluent in English). I doubt if our dishes were kosher and I don't remember observing Shabbat or attending sedars before attending the ones given by Gene's family. My parents belonged to Congregation Brith Sholom and the Jewish Community Center in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and I think my mother belonged to Hadassah and/or B'nai B'rith. When my mother died as I was graduating from high school, I remember Rabbi Tzvi Porath practically moving into our house and being extremely supportive.

My parents' friends were Jewish and the son of their closest friends was also my closest Jewish friend—and ping pong competitor—before college. My main boyfriend in high school was also Jewish, but I considered him a boyfriend of convenience (always available for proms).

One Jewish custom that particularly stayed with me was naming children in honor of someone who died and never after someone living. So I was named after my grandfather, Israel; Diana's middle name is Golda, after my mother; Pam's middle name is Lynn, after Lena; Sam is named after my father; and Tess is named after Louise, which is her middle name.

Father: Samuel (Sam/Sammie) Nathaniel Comens

My father was an orphan at 13. I might have met a nephew (Ned?), probably older than my father, when I was a child. Other than Ned, and possibly one other nephew, I remember no other relatives on my father's side. My father, like our family generally, identified as Jewish but had no interest in religion. At some point he changed his name from Kominsky to Comens; I'm not sure when, and I'm not even certain that he, not his father, changed it because I never asked.

My father had come from Lithuania to Bennington, Vermont in 1900 when he was one year old. It was a time of major Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States—a way to escape pogroms and poverty. It was also a matter of great pride to be an American and my father wanted people to think he was born here. He might not have been pleased, therefore, that I put his name on the American Immigrant Wall of Honor when it opened at Ellis Island in the 1980s. Gene and I visited Ellis Island with Sam when he was six years old. Sam found my father's name on the wall (which is also his name—Samuel Nathaniel/Samuel Nathan—and then went on a search for my father's suitcase in the museum. It's a wonderful museum, which shows the stunning diversity of the immigrants who built this country.

Grandmother (Golda's mother): Lena Vineberg Shuman

My grandmother's main link to Judaism was the kosher food and her preference for speaking Yiddish that I described. She made delicious traditional Jewish dishes—tzimmes, parogen, matzah ball soup—all my favorites. Because of my poor foreign language skills I learned virtually no Yiddish even though I heard it regularly. The colorful Yiddish expressions are one exception—but they are best told rather than written in this age of political correctness.

I recently learned from a colleague about the Yiddish Book Center on the campus of Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. Its purpose is to preserve and disseminate books written in Yiddish that might otherwise be lost. The collection currently has 1.5 million books that have been gathered from around the world and it continues to grow.

My grandmother had come from Riga (now in Latvia) to Montreal when she was five years old. When asked what Riga was like she said it was very beautiful. (It is—a smaller version of St. Petersburg.) We know nothing else about her life there.

I spent many summers with my parents and grandmother at Pocono Mountain resorts (or perhaps boarding houses?) when I was a child in the 1930s and 1940s. I know that some, and perhaps all, were considered Jewish resorts and I know we had also stayed at Jewish resorts in the Laurentian mountains near Montreal when I was very young. The main excitement in our years in the Poconos was a cross-burning by the Ku Klux Klan in front of our hotel—not the kind of excitement anyone chooses to have.

The two “luxury” resorts in the Poconos were restricted—no Jews allowed—at the time. That clearly made a big impression on me because I remember their names: Pocono Manor and Skytop. Pocono Manor was in operation until a fire last year closed the hotel—the golf course is still open. Skytop also stayed in operation.

We went to three other vacation spots when I was a child—Atlantic City, Miami Beach, and Bermuda (where my only memory is talking to a parrot on the boat and getting seasick.) I learned from Gene, who had also spent time in Atlantic City as a child, that the boardwalk was divided by religion and race and that Christian, Jewish, and Black tourists each stayed in a different section. I wonder now whether my parents were aware of this and whether they stayed in the Jewish section. And I wonder too whether they knew that Miami Beach, a popular resort for Jewish tourists, was heavily segregated and the Blacks who worked there in hotels, or as housekeepers, or in the entertainment industry had to leave the city after work.

The most famous Jewish resorts were in what was called the “Borscht Belt,” in the Catskill mountains in New York State. They were family hotels that also served as the singles bars and Internet dating sites of the time. Hundreds of these hotels flourished in the Borscht Belt in the period between the 1940s and the 1970s; they began to decline as other hotels were no longer restricted and as international travel increased. The most luxurious of these hotels can best be described as Las Vegas-type hotels on steroids, but with kosher, traditional Jewish food, larger grounds, more buildings, more sports, and, yes, more entertainment. The hotels were filled with celebrities of the time—Jackie Robinson, Mohammed Ali, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Elizabeth Taylor, Paul Newman, Milton Berle, Jack Benny—and hundreds more. Gene and I once stopped to see Grossinger’s, the most famous of the Borscht Belt resorts.

I don't remember my family going to these resorts when I was a child, but I know my father would have loved seeing Jack Benny there. He listened to the Jack Benny radio show regularly, and we all listened with him. Gene and I once had dinner with Joan Benny, Jack Benny's daughter. She had the look of Hollywood, but in a subdued way. She told us that she had spent her life giving talks about her father and other comedians and described her father as an extremely generous man, unlike the "cheap" Jack Benny portrayed in the show. I am reminded of the line from "Hamilton," "Who tells your story?"

Grandfather (Golda's father): Israel Shuman

My grandfather died when Golda was about 16. I know I was named after him and he was a tailor, but I have no other information about him, where he was born, when he came to Montreal, or what he was like. I know our family was poor. A few years ago we visited the area in Montreal where my grandparents lived and my mother grew up; it now overlooks a park and is quite attractive, but the neighborhood of my mother's youth has vanished.

Grandmother (Sam's mother): Sarah Kominsky

Strangely, I am not sure about my grandmother's name but Sarah comes to mind. I do know she died when my father was three and was much younger than my grandfather. She almost certainly was his second wife—which explains why my father's nephews were older than he was.

Grandfather (Sam's father): Abraham Kominsky

My grandfather died when my father was 13. He was an Orthodox rabbi—I assume almost all rabbis were Orthodox at that time. The Bennington synagogue, Congregation Beth El—a beautiful synagogue, now considered historic—was built after my grandfather died, but the Jewish congregation

had been formed earlier so he would have been part of it. The congregation probably met in people's homes.

My father would have enjoyed knowing that Rabbi Joshua Boettiger, President Franklin Roosevelt's great grandson, was rabbi at Congregation Beth El between 2006 and 2012 and that we met him. (Franklin Roosevelt's grandson had married a Jewish woman.) Rabbi Boettiger was interviewed extensively when he first became rabbi in Bennington and told this story: When he was five, he told his parents, "I don't know whether to be Jewish or Christian. I think I'll just be a Republican." "Anything but that," his mother said.

My family, and the Jewish community generally, loved Roosevelt for winning the war against Hitler, for his progressive social policies, and for his appointment of Jews to the Supreme Court, the cabinet, and as his advisors. My parents had liberal views on social issues—except for health policy. My father was against "socialized medicine" and I remember writing a high school paper that also argued against it. (Sorry, Diana!)

Roosevelt was president from the time I was two months old until I was past 12. He and World War II were very much part of our household conversation and the news we read and listened to. I had been conscious of the war since I was very young, when my mother showed me a newspaper photo of Hitler and said he was a bad man. (I put a pencil through his face.) My father was making 50 house calls many days because the younger doctors had been drafted. We had ration cards. I saw gold and silver stars in neighborhood windows honoring family members who had been killed or wounded. I sat on the floor in the dark school basement during air raid drills (glad to have a break from class). When I came running home to tell my family that Roosevelt had died, my parents and grandmother burst into tears.

I don't know whether my family was aware that Roosevelt and his wife, Eleanor, were initially what I would describe as "country club anti-Semites," who reflected the anti-Semitism of the time in their comments. And I don't know whether my family was critical of Roosevelt, as many were, for not opening the United States to more Jewish refugees from Hitler and not taking action to stop the trains going to concentration camps (by bombing the tracks, for example). Some think he did not want to be considered a "Jewish" president, just as the Jewish owner of The New York Times during World War II did not want The New York Times to be considered a Jewish newspaper and placed articles about the Holocaust on back pages.

An aside about Eleanor Roosevelt, the First Lady: She is described as ahead of her time but she was actually ahead of any time—no First Lady before or later compared to her, either as First Lady or afterwards. After her early anti-Semitic comments, she spent her life fighting for Jews, for Blacks, and as part of humanitarian causes more generally. One of her most famous protests was resigning from the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) in 1939 when the DAR would not permit Marian Anderson, a famous Black opera singer, to perform at DAR Constitutional Hall. Roosevelt arranged instead for Anderson to hold the concert at the Lincoln Memorial. (75,000 people filled the mall, compared to the 3,700 who could have been seated at Constitution Hall!)

Uncle: Lionel Shuman, his wife Ruth, and their daughters, Zoe Sindell and Micki Schildkraut

Lionel apparently was instrumental in bringing my parents together. He belonged to the same Jewish fraternity at McGill University in Montreal that my father belonged to at the University of Vermont in Burlington. My parents met at a fraternity party, probably in Montreal—a two-hour drive from Burlington.

We got together with Lionel and family in New York and Bethlehem when I was a child. I don't know if Lionel and Ruth were observant, but I do know

that Zoe and Micki have large family Passover dinners; they and their children had Jewish weddings and their children and grandchildren had bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs. Micki and her husband, Dohn, have taken at least two trips to Israel planned around their grandchildren's bar mitzvah celebrations. As far as I know, they are not kosher—at least not when we're eating out! We have spent many wonderful evenings over the years with them at Metropolitan Opera performances and Micki is also well-known to members of our family as the person who got us the "Hamilton" tickets!

One of Dohn's uncles, Joseph Schildkraut, was a famous Jewish film star and the son of Rudolph Schildkraut, a well-known actor in Yiddish theater. Two of Joseph's roles were Otto Frank in "The Diary of Anna Frank" and Alfred Dreyfus in "The Life of Emil Zola." (Dreyfus was a Jewish captain in the French army who was falsely accused of being a spy. The Dreyfus affair and the anti-Semitism and anti- anti-Semitism surrounding it divided France for 12 years, starting in the late 19th century. "An Officer and a Spy" is a fascinating book describing these events.)

Dohn's aunt, Esphyr Slobodkina, was a Russian American children's author and illustrator and a modern artist. Her best-known children's book is "Caps for Sale." Dohn asked her to sign two copies for us, one for each family. The book features a peddler, typical of Jewish life in Russia at the time. Her paintings are in a number of major museums and, according to Dohn, their prices "took off" and began selling for \$50,000 when she was in her seventies.

Aunt: Sylvia Shuman Bond, her husband, Jack (Bonnie) Bond, and their children, Elayne and Michael Bond

Sylvia was my favorite aunt from the time I was a young child. We went to Montreal frequently as I was growing up and we spent the summer after my mother's death at her home in Montreal. Bonnie, her husband, was greatly admired as a Renaissance man: the intellectual of the family, a brilliant amateur pianist, and a bridge and tennis champion in Montreal. Sylvia and

Bonnie were not observant, but they identified as Jewish and were part of a largely Jewish community of family and friends.

I have been in close touch with Elayne since I was first introduced to her when she was a few months old. I know she attends Passover dinners and other Jewish events, but is not observant. She had a Jewish wedding, and her children celebrate Passover and other Jewish holidays and had Jewish weddings. Maya sang at Lynn and Geoff's wedding!

Michael and his wife, Sharon, who live in Montreal, are more traditionally observant. They are members of a Reconstructionist synagogue—an important part of their lives, as is the Jewish community. Their children had a bar mitzvah/bat mitzvah and Jewish weddings.

We had a Passover dinner at our house that Michael and Sharon attended with their children when their son was 13. He had recently had his bar mitzvah and spent the entire service telling us what we were doing wrong (and it certainly wasn't difficult to find what we were doing wrong!). This boy turned into a lovely human being and he and his mother later apologized. My analysis is that he was going through teenage angst at the time.

Aunt: Beatrice Shuman, Sylvia's twin sister

I knew Beatrice best when she lived with us before moving to New York. She had assumed Bonnie would marry her because they had similar intellectual interests and, like Bonnie, she loved classical music. But he chose Sylvia.

MY “ADOPTED” FAMILY

Stepmother: Louise Nunes Comens

Louise’s first husband: Lee Nunes

Louise’s parents: Mildred and Morris Adler

Louise’s daughters: Carol Nunes Lazarus and Barbara Nunes

Carol’s husband and their sons: Hal Lazarus, Mark and Eric

Louise’s brother, his wife, and their daughters: Fred and Helen Adler, Vicki, Deb, and Rachel

Louise’s sister, her husband, and their children: Janet and Arthur McDowell, Charlotte, Arthur, Barbara, and Bruce

My father married Louise a year after my mother died. I was 18 and finishing my freshman year at Cedar Crest College. Louise, like my mother, was a great wife for my father and a wonderful stepmother for me. She and her family became my second family—and my friends—and I have been close to members of her family through four generations.

Louise and my mother had been close friends in Bethlehem. Louise was not observant but, like my parents, identified as Jewish and belonged to the Congregation Brith Sholom and the Jewish Community Center. Her first husband, Lee, was from Jamaica and I speculate that he was descended from Spanish Jews who were expelled during the Spanish Inquisition in the 15th century. Lee died of heart disease in his 30s and their daughter, Barbara, who was about my age, also died of heart disease when she was nine. Louise and Carol then moved to the Pittsburgh area where Louise had been raised and lived there until my father suggested they get married after my mother died.

Carol had planned a student trip to Europe that summer. (The cost was \$1,000, which included the trans-Atlantic voyage, all hotels, all tours, most meals, and a sexy Swiss tour guide, for 10 weeks in England, France, Italy, and Switzerland.) When my father bought me a ticket, Carol was not pleased that her “little” sister would be intruding on her freedom, but we became close friends on the trip and I remained close to Carol and her family and now to her son, Mark, and his wife, Anna.

Louise’s father, Morris, was a committed Communist ideologically and felt that the Soviet Union and Joseph Stalin could do no wrong. Arthur McDowell, Morris’s son-in-law, was an equally committed labor leader and Socialist. In 1929 he had been expelled from the University of Pittsburgh for his political activities. According to Barbara, his daughter, he had unknowingly joined an organization run by Communists, became president, and then participated in activities that “disrupted” the university.

I assume this experience triggered his antipathy toward Communism. Socialists and Communists generally hated each other and that hatred played out in epic battles between Morris and Arthur at each McDowell dinner party. I found these arguments tedious at the time but interesting to think about now. Morris’s idealism and search for social justice made Communism seem like the ideal way to go because of its philosophy of equality—and he could never bring himself to believe that the philosophy he so valued had turned instead into mass murder under Stalin.

Jews have often joined the fight for social justice and part of the anti-Semitism, in Europe especially, was because of a perceived link between Jews and Communist activities. The link began in the early days of the movement before the horrors that followed were realized, but it was visible enough to increase the anti-Semitism that already existed—and Hitler built on it.

Harry Keen, an idealistic young Jewish neighbor in Bethlehem, was killed in the 1930s fighting for the Communists in the Spanish Civil War. He had sent a postcard to us saying he was fighting to “make the world a safer place for Iris.” I was five at the time. I once found his name at a museum exhibit on Americans who fought in the Spanish Civil War. He is also described on the website of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives.

Jews were also in the forefront of fighting with Blacks for civil rights in the south in the 1950s and 1960s—and beyond—although the relationships became more complicated as, for example, the Palestinian issue became more prominent.

I believe that all people who fight for social justice—regardless of their religion, or lack of it—are motivated by their particular culture, history, and beliefs. For many Jews, the historical context of centuries of persecution—the Inquisition, the Holocaust, pogroms—serves as an incentive to protect the rights of others. That context is why, for example, the Holocaust Museum in Washington has special exhibits and information about a wide range of groups who suffered under genocides and persecutions, including Blacks, Armenians, Cambodians, Rwandans, Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Roma, people with disabilities, gays and lesbians. It is also the reason that the Israeli control of Palestinian rights is heartbreaking to so many Jews.

When Janet, Louise’s sister, married Arthur, a Protestant, they joined the Unitarian Church—which was quite typical—and their descendants have mostly continued to be Unitarians. The Unitarian church has little religious dogma and, with generally liberal congregations, focuses on social justice issues. Some members of the extended McDowell family celebrate Jewish holidays, especially Passover. One of Janet’s granddaughters, Mara Dowdall, became a Unitarian minister in Vermont and was involved in interfaith groups and social justice causes, as was Rabbi Boettiger. I gave her his name and assume they met.

Louise's niece, Deb Adler, was married to Governor Mario Cuomo's personal pilot. The current governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, is Mario's son. Another niece, Rachel Adler, married a nephew of Alexander Calder, the sculptor who invented the mobile. His sculpture is prominent in museums throughout the world and I am sure you have seen it in the East Wing of the National Gallery in Washington. I often brag that I am related to Calder!

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I feel fortunate to have had a rather unusual mix of experiences. I was Jewish and, therefore, a minority, which I have always enjoyed. At the same time, my entire childhood was spent with families and children whose backgrounds and religions were different from mine. Their income levels also differed—my neighborhood friends, the children of steelworkers, were poorer than we were; my classmates were the children of steel executives, the richest families in Bethlehem.

My neighborhood friends were my best friends. Their fathers worked in the blast furnaces of the Bethlehem Steel, three blocks from their homes (and from our home, which also served as my father's medical office). I imagine the blast furnaces were the closest anyone could come to working in Hell. Their mothers cleaned the steel mills. Accidents were part of the work day, just as domestic violence and alcoholism were an ongoing part of life after hours. My father was the neighborhood doctor—a family doctor who really was a family doctor. He charged \$5 for a house call and \$3 for an office visit. He treated people whether or not they could pay, and many grateful patients brought cakes and pies to our house. He also understood well that the needs of the families went far beyond medical care. A few years ago I got a call from my best friend's sister, who told me that my father had talked repeatedly to her mother about getting her and the other children "out of here" by making sure they went to college. My friend's sister had

been one of the beneficiaries. After this description, it might seem strange that I loved my neighborhood. I guess I was able to love it because I did not personally go through the hardships my friends' families endured and my friends, despite the traumas they went through, were able to be kids like any others. (Quinn, Chuck Bednarik grew up in our neighborhood. His parents worked for the Bethlehem Steel and my father was their family doctor!)

The lives of my classmates were very different. They lived on large estates, far from the steel mills, in a world of limousines, country clubs, and horses. They were shocked to hear we had only one car—at a time when few families in my neighborhood owned a car at all. Moravian Seminary, the fundamentalist school I attended, was anti-Semitic, but like many children, I protected my parents and didn't tell them, even though if I had told them they would have taken me out of the school—which is what I wanted at the time. (And, for a bit of foreshadowing, the school I attended in first grade, before Moravian Seminary, was ...the Quinn School!)

Although none of us would purposely choose an anti-Semitic school for our children—and my parents would not have continued to send me there if they had known—I am now oddly grateful for the experience, particularly because it was combined with my positive neighborhood experience. I learned, therefore, to live in three different worlds—my family's world and two that were very different from my family's and from each other. I believe these experiences paved the way for the diverse environments I have valued in my work life. And perhaps they also paved the way for the research I have conducted on integration and segregation.

My experience at Moravian Seminary also taught me to distrust authority and to question what I was told. I was told daily in chapel that those who did not believe in Jesus would go to Hell. I knew the minister was looking at me because I was the only one in the room who didn't believe in Jesus. At six, conversion seemed like the safer option—after all, the Jewish religion did not threaten Hell for Christians. At seven, I decided they did not know what they were talking about.

In chapel, I sang the hymns, but stayed silent for the words Jesus, Christ, and Holy Ghost. The biggest honor was to be chosen to sing, “Jesus Mine, in Me Shine” at Christmas. One part of me wanted the honor even though I felt it wouldn’t be right for me to sing “Jesus Mine.” And I knew I wouldn’t be asked anyway because I couldn’t carry a tune and I was Jewish.

In seventh grade the teacher asked me if I minded if we read “The Merchant of Venice.” Yes, I minded, but I said I didn’t.

I learned later at Cedar Crest College (affiliated with the United Church of Christ at the time) that religious schools did not have to be like Moravian Seminary. My experience at Cedar Crest was very positive, and I remember my religion teacher, a minister, going out of his way to distinguish historical analyses of the Bible from theological interpretations. Two generations later, Eva also had an excellent experience at Santa Clara, a Jesuit university where, for example, students could fulfill religion requirements by choosing among courses on a variety of religions and philosophies.

In addition to my personal experiences, I was greatly influenced by the major events of the time—World War II, the Holocaust, and then the tragedies under the Communist dictatorships in the Soviet Union and China, apartheid in South Africa, and the “dirty wars” in Argentina and Chile. I developed a strong interest in how individuals react in these environments and sought books, films, and exhibits that described those who rescued Jews, those who opposed Hitler or Stalin or Mao, or Botha, or Videla, or Pinochet, those who collaborated willingly to gain power, and those who collaborated because they had no choice.

I also extended these interests to more benign settings. If someone opposed Hitler or Stalin or Mao they would almost certainly be killed. But how do people react to injustices in less dangerous environments—for example, Congress or bureaucracies in the United States—where their lives would not be at stake?

These are the issues that have always fascinated me and I believe are closely related to growing up Jewish at the time of the historical events I describe.

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Gene was raised in a middle-class, Jewish neighborhood, an environment very different from mine. His home was kosher and Irv, his father, attended Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services at the neighborhood synagogue. Irv also fasted on Yom Kippur. The first Passover dinners I remember attending were at Gene's home, starting the spring of 1954, during my senior year at Penn. The kitchen was thoroughly cleaned and the two sets of dishes and cooking utensils used all year were exchanged for two sets of Passover dishes and utensils. All the traditional foods were served—in abundance. Irv ran a classic service, which was accompanied by cries of hunger and “speed it up” by others at the table—all of which he accepted with good humor—as he continued the service. Blanche, Gene's mother, managed the dinner preparations, but other than that I don't remember her being involved in religious activities.

We have attended different types of Passover dinners over the years—many at Gene's family's home, some at our home, some at friends' homes, an occasional one at a university, or a synagogue, or a restaurant. A few years ago we attended one at the Booths run by a Booth/Bray friend. It was the most moving and interesting Passover service I have ever experienced.

Gene specializes in two Passover dishes—gourmet charoset, which he is particularly proud of, and fried matzah. My specialty is eating matzah ball soup and, thanks to Leigh and now Maya, the soup is in good supply in Denver. And judging from a recent Passover dinner at our home, Hayden has inherited the family taste for matzah balls.

As a sociology major at Penn I was required to conduct a senior research thesis. I don't remember whether Gene or I came up with the research topic—the reaction of Jews to their Jewishness. The interviewees were Gene's neighbors. Gene has the research report—somewhere. I was never comfortable with the topic or the methods, even while conducting the research, and I know I would be embarrassed by them now. I know too that the research would never have passed the Institutional Review Board (IRB), if one had existed at the time. For some strange reason, the project won the year's sociology prize at Penn. No competition?

Gene and I were married in August, 1954, after I graduated from college and he graduated from law school. We had an elegant wedding at Curtis Arboretum in Philadelphia, arranged by Louise with her usual efficiency—as if it were the easiest thing in the world. My only involvement was in choosing the wedding gown. We spent \$150 for it, which seemed like an extravagant amount at the time.

The wedding was a traditional Jewish wedding, with Rabbi William Frankel (then the rabbi in Bethlehem) presiding. We stood under a chuppah, drank the traditional wine, and Gene broke the glass. We also signed the ketubah. I don't remember whether we danced the hora. Jay, Gene's brother, was best man and Carol was matron of honor. I walked down the aisle with my father. Among the guests were many of my parents' friends from Bethlehem, who were also Louise's friends.

Rabbi Frankel was an excellent public speaker and we were pleased with the ceremony. The most memorable line, however, came from Blanche, Gene's mother. During the reception, she asked the band leader, "Why is the music so quiet? Aren't we paying you enough?" The band leader responded, pointing to Hal, Louise's son-in-law, "The man in the brown suit asked us to play more softly." Blanche's response, "Tell the man in the brown suit to go _ _ _ _ himself." Hal has been retelling the story about the man in the brown suit for close to 70 years.

We intended to spend some time in Kennebunkport, Maine, on our way to Montreal for our honeymoon. We wrote to several hotels asking about reservations and all turned us down. One said we wouldn't be happy in Kennebunkport because there were no synagogues; another said it only served Christians; the third was even more direct—we don't take Hebrews. Our letters, of course, hadn't mentioned religion or synagogues, but the recipients assumed from our name that we were Jewish. Kennebunkport is well known because it has been home to the Bush family compound for more than a century.

Hotels and neighborhoods that did not take Jews were still quite common in the 1950s and practically non-existent after the early 1960s. (The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964.) The trend was similar with respect to university quotas that limited the percentage of Jewish students admitted. Recently, legal cases have argued that Asian-American students are now subject to similar types of quotas.

I remember only three other examples of anti-Semitism that I was involved with personally. The friends of a Lehigh University student I dated were anti-Semitic and also predicted (correctly!) that I would leave him. A friend of a woman I worked with mentioned at lunch that Jews "stick to themselves." My colleague turned to me and asked, "Iris, do you stick to

yourself?” The woman spent the rest of the lunch apologizing. And then there was a hairdresser who whispered in my ear that her son didn’t get into the University of Maryland because a Jew took his spot. She was shocked to hear I was Jewish because I was a “nice lady” and explained that she never would have made the comment if she had known. (Sam, your Einstein riddle reminds me that when the Lehigh student and I visited Princeton University we made sure to see the Institute for Advanced Study, where Albert Einstein worked, just on the small chance he might walk out at that time. And he did! Einstein gave me a big smile, I guess because I was staring at him so intently—or maybe it was a big laugh!)

Although no one has said it directly to me, a belief that the Jews killed Jesus has been a major contributor to anti-Semitism for hundreds of years. That belief appears to have reached even a remote area of Nepal, as described by a friend who went to a bar there. The bartender pointed to a picture of Jesus someone had given him and said, “This is your god.” My friend responded, “He’s not my god, I’m Jewish”—to which the bartender replied, “Oh, you’re the one who killed him.”

Apart from my years at Moravian Seminary, Gene and I both feel that anti-Semitism had no negative effects on our opportunities. Gene feels he actually got his job at the Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) because he was Jewish! Sex discrimination was the main barrier I encountered—for starters, the catalogue for the psychology doctoral program at Johns Hopkins University said “men preferred” (in italics so it wouldn’t be missed) and the faculty club seemed to have an issue with meals and doors. Women couldn’t have lunch at the club but could have dinner there, and enter through the front door, if accompanied by a man, but had to enter through the side door if alone. I never figured out why a woman would enter alone since she wasn’t allowed to be there without a man, but I’m sure there was a good reason that a man could explain.

Diana and Pam grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland, in a neighborhood with many Jewish families. Most of the families at the time attended a nearby Conservative synagogue. Because there was also an Orthodox synagogue within walking distance, Orthodox families began moving into the neighborhood and their children attend yeshivas and Jewish schools and not Burnt Mills Elementary School, the public school Diana and Pam attended.

I'm reminded of an Orthodox Jewish student in my class a few years ago who told me about the East Ramapo School District in New York State, where he resided. The Orthodox children attended yeshivas or other private schools, but the Orthodox men dominated the public school board and the public schools, with a largely Black and Latinx student body, were underfunded. The NAACP brought a lawsuit on behalf of Black and Latinx voters and, in May of this year, the case was decided in their favor.

We joined Temple Sinai, a Reform synagogue, for a few years but then dropped out because we were not taking the time to get involved and used it very little. Diana and Pam both attended Sunday school for a short time (but probably not at Temple Sinai)—Pam for a shorter time than Diana because she dropped out quite quickly, citing cognitive dissonance as the reason. She said we were not lighting candles on Friday night, or following other rituals that she was being taught at Sunday school. The psychological conflict, therefore, created stress that could only be cured by dropping out. (Pam also left Camp Kinderland, a Yiddish Socialist camp that she attended with a friend, Deb Gottesman, and with Mark and Eric. I remember stories about being good Socialists and sharing food packages—even if there was only enough food in the package to give each child a crumb. But the camp's philosophy was not the reason Pam left. When it came to camps, Pam was an equal opportunity dropout.)

Gene and I sometimes attended Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services—at a variety of synagogues; the other services we attended were primarily in connection with bar mitzvahs, bat mitzvahs, weddings, and

memorial services. We went to the Eisenberg's (Julie and Ellen's family) post-Rosh Hashanah dessert gathering every year we were in town, and often attended the Fishman's (Silver Spring neighbors) break the fast dinner.

The most unique wedding we attended was Daniel Rotberg's (Jay's son) first wedding on his farm in Georgia, which combined a traditional Kabbalah ceremony with the feel of a 19th century village celebration—or at least the film versions I have seen. Various animals, including llamas, wandered around as the Orthodox ceremony was held. A long progression of the guests who were neighbors arrived carrying platters of the most delicious vegetarian and vegan (carefully labeled) food I have ever tasted—a scene again reminding me of the 19th century.

The marriage itself lasted only a few years. We attended Daniel's second wedding with Maya, who lived in Los Angeles at the time. The Orthodox Kabbalah ceremony was held at the Kabbalah Centre in Los Angeles—a very different environment from the earlier farm wedding! This center was well-known because many celebrities, including Madonna, had attended. The reception was festive and reminiscent of the wedding scene in “Fiddler on the Roof.” Daniel and his wife and children have now moved back to the farm, completing the circle.

The most memorable Yom Kippur service we attended was in an unlikely setting—a small synagogue in New Paltz, New York, on a trip to Mohonk Mountain House with Hal, Mark, and Eric Lazarus. The rabbi was very young and very fat, but looks can be deceiving and this rabbi gave the best Yom Kippur sermon I have ever heard and one I have retold many times—you almost certainly have heard it!

The rabbi brought together two themes—atonement, which is central to Yom Kippur, and forgiveness, which is central to Christianity. He argued that Judaism also includes the concept of forgiveness, but—in contrast to

Christianity— forgiveness in Judaism is not granted by God, but can be given only by the person who has been offended. He told the story of an old Russian rabbi on a train who was being taunted and bullied. But when the train arrived in the village, those ridiculing him saw that the entire village had come out to greet him and realized he was actually a very important person. So they went to the rabbi's house to ask his forgiveness. When he refused to see them his son asked, "Why won't you talk to them? You have always been willing to forgive." The rabbi responded, "I am not the person they should be begging for forgiveness. Tell them to find a poor, lonely man and ask him to forgive them." This story extends a traditional theme of Yom Kippur: Sins against people are forgiven only if we seek forgiveness from those we have hurt.

I prefer Conservative to Reform services because of the music! And at the risk of sounding male chauvinist, I acknowledge preferring male to female cantors because the music was composed for tenors and baritones and much of it is operatic. It is not surprising that some famous opera stars were also cantors; among the best known are Richard Tucker and Jan Peerce. My favorite chant composed for cantors is the "Kol Nidrei," which opens the Yom Kippur service. It reminds me of the haunting melodies of Giuseppe Verdi's operas and, particularly, of "Va, Pensiero," from "Nabucco," which begins with a cry of anguish by the chorus of Jewish slaves in exile: "Fly, my thoughts, on wings of gold."

"Va, Pensiero," became a symbol of freedom from oppression in 19th century Italy and remains a symbol of protest in current times. In 2013, when we arrived at the Bergamo opera house for a performance of "Nabucco," we were greeted outside by the orchestra and chorus performing "Va, Pensiero" to protest Italian government cuts in funding for the arts. It is interesting to compare the lyrics of "Va, Pensiero" with the 137th Psalm, from which they were adapted. First, the beginning lines of the psalm:

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion.

How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?”

And the lyrics of “Va, Pensiero,” written almost 25 centuries later:

“Fly, my thoughts, on wings of gold;

go settle on the slopes and the hills,

where, soft and mild, the sweet airs

of my native lands smell fragrant.

Greet the banks of the Jordan

and Zion’s toppled towers.

Oh, my homeland, so lovely and so lost!

Oh, memory, so dear and so dead!

Golden harp of the prophets of old,

why do you now hang silent upon the willow?

Rekindle the memories in our hearts,

and speak of times gone by!

Mindful of the fate of Solomon’s temple,

Let me cry out with sad lamentation,

or else may the Lord strengthen me

to bear these sufferings!”

We have seen several productions of “Nabucco,” but by far the most powerful and the most beautiful was the performance at the Bregenz festival in Austria, on a floating stage on Lake Constance. Gene remembers that at one point the chorus of Hebrew slaves turned to the audience and pointed at it. Fifty years after World War II, in a country that had been complicit in the Holocaust, “Nabucco’s” music and lyrics were used to show the horrors of the Holocaust.

Verdi’s music is linked to Jewish history in at least one other way. (Maya, when you asked me to write about my memories of our Jewish identity, did you think I would manage to bring Verdi into the discussion not once, but twice?) Sixteen years ago we attended a performance of “The Defiant Requiem, Verdi at Terezin” at Catholic University in Washington. Terezin (called Theresienstadt by the Nazis) was a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia where a large number of Jewish scholars and artists were held; many were later sent to Auschwitz. The performance at Catholic University commemorated the 16 performances of Verdi’s Catholic Requiem given by a chorus of 150 Jewish prisoners at Terezin between 1943 and 1944. Rafael Schaecter, the conductor at Terezin, saw the Requiem “as a way they could sing to the Nazis what they could not say to them”—phrases like “a day of wrath, the day of judgment.” The beautiful music and words of this Catholic mass had a powerful effect on the Jewish prisoners. A survivor from the chorus said, “We were so far inside the music that we were at Verdi’s table.” A survivor who had been in the audience said, “we listened desperately to the music” [with the same focus and intensity as if running] to grab a piece of bread someone had dropped.”

* * * * *

Pam and Mike and Diana and Leigh celebrated their weddings on our lawn. They stood under a chuppah, drank the traditional wine, and broke the traditional glass. A festive hora followed at the reception. They were

married by rabbis who were not part of the main branches of Judaism because even Reform synagogues did not permit their rabbis to officiate at “mixed” marriages. I do not know whether that requirement has mellowed. The weddings also included non-traditional elements—selections from opera, Christian liturgical music, and, at Diana and Leigh’s wedding, square dancing.

Irv, Gene’s father, was able to attend and enjoy both weddings but not without some drama during the years before Pam and Mike’s wedding. His initial response came after he received a postcard from Pam, written while she and Mike were spending a weekend on the French Riviera during their semester abroad in London. The postcard mentioned they were having breakfast on their balcony. Irv immediately called us to ask why Pam was having breakfast with a man she wasn’t married to—and who wasn’t Jewish (which I’m sure is what bothered him most). Irv’s reaction continued until Pam and Mike announced their engagement, when he immediately turned a corner and never again questioned Mike’s religion. He replaced his concern about religion with pride in his granddaughter’s future husband: “I won’t live to see it, but that boy will be famous some day.” The possibility of fame had trumped (excuse the expression) religion. It had also immunized Irv against any concern about Leigh’s religion.

A few years later, Irv became interested in a Catholic woman. When I teased him by saying, “But, Irv, she’s not Jewish,” he responded, “When did I ever care about someone’s religion?”

I told these anecdotes at Irv’s memorial service as part of my tribute to his ability to change, even at a late age.

To bring this discussion about Irv closer to current issues—and specifically to protests against police brutality—we have Irv’s painting of almost 100 years ago showing police beating a Black man.

The first civil rights march I remember attending was the March on Washington in August, 1963, when Martin Luther King gave his “I have a dream” speech. I don’t remember whether we heard the speech, but I do remember that on President Barack Obama’s inauguration day I met a young Black woman who was very moved that I had attended the March on Washington. Although the event had taken place long before she was born, it was for her, as for many others, the most powerful milestone on the way to Obama’s presidency.

We participated in subsequent civil rights and anti-Vietnam protests, some with Diana and Pam. Diana also remembers attending John Kennedy’s funeral procession in November, 1963. Pam was there too, as a 2-week-old embryo. On one occasion, we got caught in tear gas as I drove Irv to a Jewish War Veterans meeting during an anti-Vietnam war demonstration at Dupont Circle in Washington. On another, this time in Copenhagen at a World Bank meeting, we were on the receiving end: Demonstrators threw rocks and tried to overturn our car to protest World Bank “colonialism.”

But, for me, the civil rights movement played out mostly in my professional life—the field I chose, my colleagues over the past 55 years, and my students over the past 20 years.

I left research psychology for public policy research in the 1960s and worked as a staff member of a presidential commission on welfare reform. I moved from there to the Office of Economic Opportunity, which was established to implement President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty programs, and then to a new government agency, the National Institute of Education, headed by Thomas Glennan. (Madeline and Hayden, Thomas Glennan was the son of T. Keith Glennan, the first director of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration—NASA!)

This was a great time to enter the public policy/education policy field. The field was new and researchers and policy analysts in Washington were

making major contributions to its development. At the same time, the civil rights movement was going strong. So the confluence of these two trends meant that those of us in policy research fields have spent our lives on issues of racism, discrimination, segregation, poverty—and inequality in all its forms: education, housing, health, employment, income, wealth, criminal justice, civil rights. (Emma, I remember somewhere around this time giving a guest lecture at your university—then called the New School for Social Research!)

I was fortunate to be involved in this field at a time of enormous social change and to witness the impact of that change in the lives of Black colleagues and students. They have all, I know, experienced racism and some talk about it personally or in class. A few are bitter. But for the most part I see incredibly impressive people who are confident, committed, and kind—and highly successful in their fields and as students. The civil rights movement and civil rights legislation, along with Constitutional protections, have made an enormous difference in their lives. So has increased access to higher education and employment. And these benefits have compounded over the generations. Yes, the Trump administration has caused a lot of pain, but it can't turn back the clock—much as it would like to. We have all gained. The country is a very different and far better place than it was when I started working in this field.

I know that is hard to believe given the continuing racism and the enormous inequities that remain—inequities that began with what a colleague describes as “the original sin” of slavery. But for those who have seen it happen for the past several decades the change feels almost miraculous. I wish I could bring you back to a day in the 1950s or 1960s! Instead, I suggest watching movies, or videos of television newsrooms, from that time period. YouTube has a video of the first broadcast of the Today show on January 14, 1952. You will see a lot of white men in white shirts, an occasional white woman assisting them, and no one of any other race or ethnicity. Compare that, for example, with CNN's current newsroom.

Far too many, however, have not been able to share in these gains and the continuing effects of family poverty and concentrated poverty in communities and schools are devastating. These are the problems that your generation will confront as you continue the battle for civil rights. The policies that would make a difference are known; the question is whether the country has the political will to implement them—in employment, in housing, in health care, in criminal justice, in access to higher education.

I am moved by how strongly you feel about the current civil rights movement. And you have the added advantage of coming into this without all the “baggage” of previous generations. I am optimistic that your generation will have the opportunity to contribute to even more dramatic change than Gene and I have experienced. I have enjoyed discussing these issues with you over the years and, most recently, with Madeline as she stands up for diversity at the University of Colorado.

As I write about civil rights I think of Mary Hatwood Futrell, who was Dean of George Washington University’s Graduate School of Education and Human Development for the first 14 years I was there. As a Black woman who grew up in Virginia before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Mary attended segregated schools. Three generations earlier her family had been slaves. She began teaching in Virginia in the early 1960s as school districts were resisting court-ordered desegregation, schools were being closed, and one school district closed entirely for five years. (Diana and Madeline, I know both of you are contributing to the NAACP and you might be interested to know that it was a central player in the battle for integration in Virginia—as in many other states.) Mary went on to become the first Black and the first woman to head the National Education Association. She became dean at George Washington University shortly before I left my job at the National Science Foundation and offered me a research professor position. I had initially been interested in volunteering as a researcher at the Holocaust Museum and might have chosen that if it had been offered, but the person I spoke to suggested instead a docent position I had no interest in. So George Washington University it was!

Mary once told me about a shocking racist incident against her when she was being considered for the dean's position. But despite the barriers and racism she had experienced, Mary never thought of herself as a victim. Just the opposite. She thought of herself as a highly successful woman who was fully able to accomplish her goals—and help others do the same. Mary gave this advice in her speech to the graduating students each year: “If a door opens, go through it; then turn around and take someone with you.”

Diana, you'll be interested to know that we attended an event at the South African Embassy where Mary was honored by Franklin Sonn for her work opposing apartheid in South Africa. (Franklin Sonn was Nelson Mandela's first ambassador to the United States. Diana had interned at Saint Elizabeth's Hospital with his brother, Julian. The Sonn family was part of the “mixed-race” community in Cape Town, South Africa, and we spent time with the family when we visited Cape Town as apartheid was ending and shortly before Mandela was first elected president.)

Have you heard the phrase, “40 acres and a mule?” (It is also the name of Spike Lee's movie company.) That is what freed slaves were supposed to get after the Civil War. I was reminded of it again when Mary mentioned that her family was in negotiations about land that was almost worthless at the time they received it but has now increased in value. However, most freed slaves never received any land. Black families, therefore, were not given an opportunity to benefit from the increases in property values that have contributed so much to wealth creation for White families. The problem was compounded several decades later when New Deal housing programs added to existing restrictive covenants by building segregated housing and blocking home loans in areas “with inharmonious racial or nationality groups.” As a result, Black families again did not have the opportunity to accumulate wealth as housing prices increased. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 reversed this trend and many communities became more integrated. But the wealth gap continues: White families have 10

times more wealth than Black families. As a result, even high-income Black families are at risk in an economic downturn and, when the economy is good, these families are still less likely to have family resources to help their children with college tuition or the down payment on a home. The effects of government policies reverberate across generations.

* * * *

Our trips have sometimes included visits to Jewish museums, Holocaust museums and memorials, resistance museums, Jewish neighborhoods and ghettos, and synagogues. The memories that follow give more specific examples from some of our travels.

Israel:

The connection of Israel to Jewish identity is, of course, self-evident. Instead of describing here the details of our sightseeing, which can be found in guidebooks, I will focus on personal experiences.

The first time Gene and I went to Israel, Jerusalem was still divided and we were not permitted in many parts of the city. Jerusalem was unified when I was back there again, this time for a conference on education policy. I remember playing hooky from the conference and gleefully roaming the streets of Jerusalem with a colleague. I have always found Jerusalem a spectacularly beautiful city. My third trip to Israel, that same year, was with Gene, Diana, Pam, and the Gottesman family. All eight of us had just come from two weeks exploring Greek islands.

I'll begin with two of our Israeli experiences you won't find in guidebooks. Mike Gottesman, who was accustomed to defeating all opponents in board games, challenged a dealer in Jerusalem's Arab market to a game of Backgammon. "Double or nothing," Michael said, "If you win, I'll pay double

for the Backgammon set. If I win, the set is free.” Michael paid double. Later that day, we were offered 50 head of cattle for Diana. It was a difficult decision.

And... I made a pilgrimage to Bethlehem; it was special for me because it was the namesake of my hometown.

We spent time with Chaim and Ica Duvshani and their daughters, Dahlia, Tamara, and Segal in Tel Aviv. The Duvshanis were friends we had originally met in Washington when Chaim worked for the International Monetary Fund. He and Ica were sabras and they were in Lin-Manuel Miranda’s proverbial “room where it happens” when Israel became an independent country in 1948. Chaim described the political, social, and economic systems that needed to be designed from scratch in order for the country to function—systems that those in established nations take for granted. He also discussed the Hebrew language, which had been revived as a spoken language only a few decades earlier and still needed updating.

Chaim told us about fighting in Ethiopia in World War II, after Italy had invaded East Africa. When he met members of the Ethiopian Jewish communities and told them he was from Jerusalem they asked whether he knew King David. These communities had been isolated from the rest of the world’s Jews for a thousand years and their religious practices were closer to Biblical than to modern times. Most of the Ethiopian Jews now live in Israel.

I am reminded as I write about Israel that Shlomo (Sonny) Kugelmass, a professor at Hebrew University, spent a year in my office at the National Institute of Education. He was particularly interested in the resource inequalities between the Jewish and Arab school systems—both funded by the Israeli government. From what I hear, the resources are now less unequal than they were at that time but the negative effects of the segregation itself are incalculable. I have since edited a book, “Balancing

Change and Tradition in Global Education Reform,” which includes a chapter on Israel written by Adam Nir, Dan Inbar, and Ori Eyal.

Also, around that time, Yaacov Agam, a famous Israeli artist, came to my office to discuss an education project he was working on. As we met, he sketched my portrait—our only family portrait by a well-known artist. It’s lovely to have, even though it doesn’t look like me! We had earlier bought a piece of Agam’s kinetic art (his real area of expertise), which Maya now has.

The Baltic States—Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia:

This trip stands out because it was a search for roots. My grandmother (my mother’s mother) had come to Montreal from Latvia and my father and his parents had come to Bennington, Vermont from Lithuania. We traveled to the Baltic States shortly after they gained independence from the Soviet Union as it was breaking apart. It is not surprising, therefore, that there was strong antipathy to Russia and to the Russians who still lived in these countries. There was also a strong history of anti-Semitism in the Baltic States and considerable local cooperation with the Nazis in each country during the Holocaust. The anti-Semitism that already existed was exacerbated by the perceived association between Jews and the Soviet Union.

We visited the remaining synagogue in each of the three capital cities. All were functioning at the time we visited but, as you can imagine, with an extremely small membership composed of those who had returned from among the few who were still alive. I have often thought about how fortunate we all are that our family left in time.

We had a local guide in each capital—Riga, Vilnius, and Tallinn. The cities are beautiful, with a lot to see, and the guides had a set agenda to which

we added a visit to the synagogue. In Tallinn, we also added Kadriorg Park, the summer palace Peter the Great built for his wife. I was reading “Pushkin’s Button” and interested in all things Russian at the time, so the palace was at the top of my list! These two requests, a synagogue and a Russian palace, clearly constituted two strikes against us as far as the guide was concerned—at least as shown by her subsequent coldness. And, for some reason, the driver in Tallinn refused to stop in front of the synagogue and instead dropped us off farther away. Gene, whose psychological interpretations are more creative than mine, was convinced the driver thought a dybbuk would catch and punish him for past sins if he stopped too close to the synagogue.

A few years later Zoe was able to find our grandmother Lena’s family records in the Riga synagogue. We now have a family tree for my mother’s side of the family. As I remember, it goes back to the mid-1800s. I was excited about it when I first learned of it but was disappointed when I actually saw it—names, but absolutely no information about who these people were or the lives they led.

Russia:

I discuss our first trip to Russia in some detail—or, put another way, my discussion is longer than most of my other tangents. I could explain it by noting that the Baltic States were associated with the Russian Empire and, later, the Soviet Union, for most of the past 300 years, and they were still part of the Russian Empire at the time my father and grandparents left. The real reason, however, is that our trip to Russia, and our first trip to China—which I also mention here—have had a major influence on the way I think about the world.

Our first trip to Russia was in 1967, when it was still part of the Soviet Union. I wanted to learn whether the dictatorship was really as bad as reported. It was. Most shocking to me was the extent to which information

was controlled. People out of favor were literally “erased” from photos and from the news. Dissident views were life-threatening.

Our guides in Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) and Moscow had access only to highly censored news reports and they wanted to learn everything they could from us about the United States—and the Soviet Union. They warned us to keep walking as we talked so our conversations would not be obvious.

As we walked we saw incredibly beautiful sights. And a “white night” walk we took through Leningrad felt like a scene from “Doctor Zhivago.” Imagine Paris with Italian architecture and the sound of balalaikas coming from groups of young people gathered on bridges over canals.

Tourists to the Soviet Union were required to make travel arrangements through Intourist and pay in advance for hotel rooms, meals, and tours. Meals had to be eaten in the hotel; as we entered the dining room we were seated at banquet-size tables with other tourists—a surprising gift that permitted us to have conversations that felt exceptional in a society that was so closed and secretive.

In the hotel dining room we talked to a journalist who had just interviewed Joseph Stalin’s grandchildren after their mother, Stalin’s daughter Svetlana, had defected to the United States amid huge publicity. We met a very drunk reporter who shouted about the evils of the Soviet Union and was reprimanded by an elderly Russian woman in tears at the next table: “Do you know we lost 20 million people during the war?” Another told a light-hearted story about everyday corruption. A commercial flight he took landed in the wilderness. Engine trouble? No, someone on the plane had bribed the pilot to take a detour to pick up a deer’s head. And then there was the story of a man who unscrewed a metal piece on the floor thinking it was a “bug” only to hear the chandelier in the room below crash to the

ground.

I ordered borscht twice a day. Our “Jewish” dish had actually been inherited from this part of the world. At the end of the trip we had not spent enough for meals to use up the funds we had paid in advance so we were given 30 bottles of champagne, which we used for a champagne party when we returned home.

We learned a few years later that our guide in Leningrad was Jewish. She left the Soviet Union in the 1970s, a few years after our trip, during a period when Jews were permitted to emigrate. She contacted us from Albany and asked us to find her a job as an interpreter or translator. After a few weeks, when we had not yet found anything, she wrote from Rome to tell us she was unhappily married. We did not hear from her again. Around the same time we mentored a Jewish man who had emigrated from the Soviet Union to Washington. I hope he feels we were helpful. But we couldn’t accomplish what was most important to him—government support while he wrote a novel.

In the mid-1990s, we went back to the renamed Saint Petersburg. The Soviet Union had broken apart. The Russian mafia was going strong. Even people begging on the street had to pay off the mafia—with higher charges for those who reserved spots outside churches. I don’t know whether the same charges applied to synagogues!

After our trip to the Soviet Union in 1967, we had one other experience of traveling to a country that had only recently opened up to Americans. Our first trip to China was in 1981, five years after the Cultural Revolution ended. It had been a time of massive killing and suffering carried out by the Chinese military, with the help of youth groups called the “Red Guards.” The Cultural Revolution was designed to rid China of all vestiges of classical Chinese or of Western culture. Anyone who owned a violin, or was educated, or dressed in a bourgeois style, or was a “landlord,” or

expressed a word or idea that was not approved was paraded through the streets and humiliated. Children reported the “misdeeds” of their parents.

We happened to be in China in the relatively short period when people could critique the Cultural Revolution and describe their personal experiences. A man we met told us that he, his wife, and their two sons had been sent to separate, remote rural regions for “rehabilitation.” The sons missed their entire education and never returned home. A young man from the finance ministry, who traveled with us, told us he had been a Red Guard, but reassured us he had never tortured anyone. Four years later, in 1985, when we returned to China, no one we met mentioned their suffering under the Cultural Revolution. From what I read, it was already becoming dangerous to do so. The focus now was on moving forward. And in 2016, the 50th anniversary of the start of the Cultural Revolution, there was still no acknowledgment of it in China. It was mentioned publicly only in Hong Kong. (Pam, Mike, Sam, Tess, and Hayden—As you can imagine, the China you experienced was very different from the country we saw on our first trip, almost 40 years earlier. The reduction in poverty has been astounding. And while China is still a dictatorship with disturbing human rights violations the level of abuse that occurred during the Cultural Revolution no longer exists.)

Gene adds this memory of Hong Kong: He attended Rosh Hashanah services at a beautiful synagogue (probably Ohel Leah). At the time Gene was there, about 2,000 Jews, both Western and Chinese, lived in Hong Kong. Gene attended the services with Evelyn Rothschild, a member of the Jewish banking family that has been famous internationally since the late 18th century. Gene was in Hong Kong in connection with a World Bank bond issue and he remembers a dispute with the Saudi Arabian bankers, who did not want to work with the Rothschilds.

England:

About eight years ago we were in London for the wedding of Alison and Martin Wolf's daughter. The Wolfs were family friends and Pam had often cared for their sons when they lived in Washington.

Madeline, Tess, and Emma were on spring break at the time and were able to join us for the trip. As we explored London, Madeline discovered Yayoi Kusama's infinity rooms; Tess and Emma followed in Taylor Swift's footsteps at St. Paul's Cathedral; we spent late nights at theater and after-theater feasts. One afternoon we took a tour of London's East End, the neighborhood that has been home to waves of immigrants and where Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe settled during the same period our family came to the United States. At the Liverpool Street station, we saw the Kindertransport sculpture, which commemorates the arrival in England of 10 thousand Jewish orphans between 1938 and 1939.

As I write about the Wolf family wedding I am reminded of Edmund Wolf, Martin's father, a well-known Viennese Jewish playwright, who left Vienna for London to escape the Nazis and spent the rest of his life writing documentaries for BBC and German television. A tribute was given for him in Vienna to celebrate the centennial of his birth—part of Austria's attempt to acknowledge the country's tremendous loss during the Holocaust. Unlike Eastern European Jews, who felt disconnected from the countries in which they lived, the Austrian Jews, and those in many other Western European countries, were often very much part of their societies and attached to them. Martin put it this way in the speech he gave for his father in Vienna: "...he was far more a part of the world in which he would have perished had he stayed, than the England that was his home for the last 60 years of his life."

Germany:

The generation of Germans who were young adults or older during the Nazi era spoke little about it—especially to their children, who questioned them about their role in the Holocaust. By the 1970s, however, the Nazi era was being taught in schools and school groups were visiting concentration camps, memorials, and museums. When we asked a young man at the Munich airport the best way to get to Dachau concentration camp, he apologized to us for the Holocaust. This man had been born long after World War II ended. When we arrived at the camp (only 10 miles from Munich) on a very hot day, we noticed a group of young people weeding in an area that would ordinarily have been ignored. Gene was convinced they were doing penance.

There is concern now that German remembrance of the Holocaust might be weakening as right wing ideologies grow. But, for now, students continue to learn about the Holocaust and Holocaust memorials and markers remain prominent throughout many cities in Germany. I was particularly conscious of them in Berlin, where the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe had just been completed the last time we visited. This Holocaust Memorial consists of 2,711 bleak concrete stelae, which some think were specifically designed to look like a scar on the city center. Someone pointed out the location of Hitler's bunker, now under the parking lot of an apartment complex on the far side of the memorial. This is where Hitler hid at the end of the war as Berlin—and Germany—were being destroyed. There is no marker because of a concern that Neo-Nazis will turn it into a shrine.

In addition to visiting memorials and markers specifically related to the Holocaust, Gene and I have taken "tours" (self-designed) of World War II sites in different countries and, as in the case of Munich, sites linked to Hitler's rise to power.

France:

On a trip to Normandy and Brittany with Faith and Arthur McDowell, we planned to begin with three days at the Normandy D-Day beaches and nearby villages. This was not a part of the trip I was most looking forward to—I had been there briefly before and battlefields are not my thing. But it turned out to be the part of the trip I think about most often. And three days were not enough.

We have driven around France extensively over the years and seen World War II memorials in villages throughout the country. We have seen hundreds of movies set during World War II and a few dozen made in France. Most stressed French resistance and heroism. A few described collaboration with the Nazis. From everything I read, it was clear that it had taken a long time for France to officially acknowledge its collaboration.

The French museum at Normandy, therefore, came as a surprise. It not only mentioned collaboration, but presented it vividly as an integral part of the exhibit. One room was filled with photographs of French women sightseeing with Nazi soldiers in Paris. Other rooms showed in detail France's complicity in the Holocaust. I was reminded of the surprise I felt when I came across these two inscriptions at the Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima: One apologized to the Chinese for the "Rape of Nanjing." The other apologized to the "poor souls of Hiroshima" for Japan's role in the war that led to the horrors they had endured.

We also visited the U.S. and Canadian museums at Normandy; both reflected well the cultures of their countries. The area has 40 museums, in addition to D-Day memorials and sites. I wanted to see them all!

Denmark:

Gene and I visited the Danish coastal villages from which Jews escaped to Sweden in small fishing boats and other vessels. The Nazis had scheduled the roundup of Jews to coincide with Rosh Hashanah. But the plan leaked out and word quickly spread. The chief rabbi was notified, services were cancelled, and people left their homes and scattered to the homes of other Danes and to coastal areas. Niels Bohr, the famous Danish physicist (whose mother was Jewish), contacted the Swedish King and government ministers to negotiate refuge for the Danish Jews. Ninety percent of Denmark's Jews survived the Holocaust.

Two German officers are also mentioned in connection with the advance warnings that helped the Jews escape. Werner Best, who was in charge of the German occupation of Denmark, was anything but a good man. He was a high-ranking Nazi official who had arranged the murder of thousands of Jews in Poland and then went on to become known as "the butcher of Paris." He apparently was playing it both ways in Denmark: He had planned the expulsion of the Danish Jews to concentration camps, yet might have helped undermine it by his warnings. Best received a telegram from Hitler asking why he had not fulfilled his mission. He said he had—Denmark was now "Judenrein" (free of Jews).

Georg Duckwitz, a German naval attaché in Denmark, was more clearly involved in helping the Jews escape. He tipped people off, negotiated with Sweden to accept the Jews, and worked with German patrols to reduce interference with the boats carrying Jews. He was named "Righteous Among the Nations" by Israel in 1971.

Germany had occupied Denmark in 1940, more than three years before the planned roundup of the Jews. During this period, the Germans gave Denmark considerable autonomy compared to other occupied countries in return for their surrender and collaboration. The support of the Danish government and the general population made it possible for the Jews to

remain in the country. By 1943, however, as the Danish resistance became more active, the Nazi occupation forces raised the stakes, leading to the planned roundup of the Jews.

On an earlier trip to Denmark, many years before we visited the coastal areas from which the Jews escaped, we had met two resistance leaders. They told us of leading British planes to bomb buildings used by the Gestapo, and the dangers and fears they confronted. They also told us of British planes on “Operation Carthage” that had missed the mark when attempting to bomb Gestapo headquarters, and accidentally bombed the Institut Jeanne d’Arc, a French-language Catholic school instead. Eighty-six children and 16 adults were killed and many others were injured. Despite this experience, and the risk to their own lives of working for the resistance, they looked back on this period as the best in their lives, a time when they felt their lives had meaning.

The resistance leaders showed us the memorial sculpture of the school bombing—a nun with her arms around two children, with their eyes raised to the sky. We saw the sculpture again many years later when a taxi driver said he wanted to show us something special in Copenhagen. We knew what it was but did not want to spoil his excitement at showing it to us by telling him we had already seen it.

Short Takes:

Italy:

On a trip to Venice, we visited the Jewish ghetto, which is one of the oldest ghettos in Europe and one of the first places where people were forcibly segregated because of religion. The name ghetto also initiated in Venice. The neighborhood now looks like any other section of Venice, but with synagogues and other reminders of Jewish life there. About 450 Jews still live in Venice—few in the former ghetto area. The ghetto celebrated its

500th birthday in 2016 with galas, a performance at La Fenice opera house, and, yes, a performance of “The Merchant of Venice.” (Eva, I’m wondering whether you saw the “Great Synagogue of Florence,” which was originally built in the 19th century to celebrate the Jewish community’s freedom to live outside the Florentine ghetto.)

Argentina:

The bombing of the Argentine Israeli Mutual Association (AMIA) community center occurred in 1994, not long before we visited Buenos Aires. When we went to see it, the building was under heavy security and we were not able to go inside. We did talk to someone outside about Argentina’s Jewish Community but the conversation was short and I’m wondering, Maya, whether you had any opportunity to spend time with members of this community.

Scotland:

While on a trip to Scotland with Faith and Arthur, we spent time on the Isle of Mull and, as we drove around the island, stopped at Duart castle and found ourselves in the midst of a Maclean clan reunion. (Unfortunately, Arthur, the only one of the four of us who is of Scottish descent, was not with us that day.) A priest and an Israeli Hassidic rabbi, both in kilts, were among the hundreds of clan members from around the world who had come together on this remote island. And the priest and rabbi had found each other and bonded. I got great photos of them deep in conversation. Or, to put it more accurately, the photography itself is mediocre, but the subject matter and symbolism are great.

Northern Ireland:

When we visited Belfast, a guide told us this one-line joke: When the Russian Jews came to Northern Ireland in the 1970s, the first thing they were asked is, “Are you Protestant or Catholic?” Some explanation: Conflict in Northern Ireland between Protestants and Catholics has existed for centuries. It might have started as religious conflict but it soon became a conflict of politics and power. The Protestants were aligned with the British while the Catholics were on the side of Ireland. The period between 1968 and 1998 was known in Northern Ireland as “the Troubles,” a time of violence and terrorism, with high walls dividing Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods. A peace agreement was signed in 1998, but many walls remain and in some areas gates between neighborhoods are still locked at night. So the person asking the question in the joke is not asking about religion but simply wants to know which side the Russian Jews are on.

(You might be interested in knowing that Northern Ireland is a spectacularly beautiful country. “Game of Thrones” was shot at studios in Belfast and on location in Northern Ireland and Iceland; the Titanic was built in Belfast, which now has a wonderful Titanic museum; the barrier walls in Northern Ireland are highly decorated with political art and portraits; and Obama was greeted with great enthusiasm when he visited Northern Ireland right before our trip but then came home to criticism from U. S. Catholic school officials because of a line in his speech suggesting that Protestant and Catholic students in Northern Ireland might want to consider going to the same schools.)

* * * * *

My personal experiences and the major historical events of the time have also played a big role in the books and films I have chosen over the years. I would like to conclude this memoir with a few examples I have found particularly meaningful. They are only the tip of the iceberg.

In addition to “The Diary of Anna Frank” and “Schindler’s List,” a large number of books and films have focused on those who saved Jews—Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat in Hungary; Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese diplomat in Lithuania; communities throughout Denmark that helped to save the Danish Jews, and so many others who, although less well-known, are memorialized in books and films. One good source for those is the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

And, in no particular order (except alphabetical by country of the author or film producer), these are a few of my favorite books and films that reflect historical events of my time:

Argentina:

- “The Official Story” (film)
- “The Secret in Their Eyes” (film)
- “The German Doctor” (film)

Australia:

- “Schindler’s List” by Thomas Keneally

When we first visited the Holocaust Museum in Washington we overheard a woman telling a friend that she was one of “Schindler’s Jews” and he called her his “sheyn meydI” (beautiful girl).

Britain:

- “The Spy Who Came in from the Cold” by John Le Carre
- “An Officer and a Spy,” by Robert Harris
- “Darkness at Noon” by Arthur Koestler
- “An Artist of the Floating World” by Kazuo Ishiguro
- “The Remains of the Day” by Kazuo Ishiguro (book and film versions)

China:

- “Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China” by Jung Chang
- “One Child Nation” (film)

France:

- “Shoah” (film)
- “The Sorrow and the Pity” (film)
- “Au Revoir Les Enfants” (film)
- “Is Paris Burning?” (film)
- “A French Village” (television series)

Germany:

- “The Lives of Others” (film)
- “The Edukators” (film)
- “Blind Spot: Hitler’s Secretary (film)
- “The Weissensee Saga (television series)

Iran:

- “The Day I Became a Woman” (film)

Israel:

- “My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel” by Ari Shavit
- “The Pity of It All: A Portrait of Jews in Germany 1743 - 1933” by Amos Elon
- “Walk on Water” (film)

- “Waltz with Bashir” (film)
- “The Gatekeepers” (film)
- “The Attack” (film)

Netherlands:

- “The Diary of a Young Girl,” Autobiography

Poland:

- “Decalogue” (television series)

Russia (when it was part of the Soviet Union):

- “One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch” by Alexander Solzhenitsyn
- “In the First Circle” by Alexander Solzhenitsyn

South Africa:

- “Cry the Beloved Country” by Alan Paton
- “Invictus: Nelson Mandela and the Game that Made a Nation” by John Carlin (book and film)

United States:

- “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave,” Autobiography
- “Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom” by David W. Blight
- “In the Garden of the Beasts” by Erik Larson
- “Exile” by Richard North Patterson
- “Principled Politician: Governor Ralph Carr and the Fight Against Japanese American Internment” by Adam Schrager

Ralph Carr, the Governor of Colorado, was the only governor who supported the civil liberties of Japanese Americans when they were

interned in camps during World War II. I learned about him when I saw a plaque in downtown Denver from the Japanese American community thanking him. He lost the next election, but the accolades came later, as often happens. He is a hero to the Japanese Americans, honored by the Emperor of Japan, and he was chosen as Colorado's "person of the century" by the Denver Post in 1999. (He was a Republican by the way!)

- "Schindler's List" by Thomas Keneally (book and film)
- "Gone with the Wind" (film)

Hattie McDaniel, the Black actress who graduated from Denver's East High School, played a leading role in this film. The film was removed from HBO Max and then put back a short time later with introductory comments about its racist history, thereby describing—but not erasing—the history we wish had never happened.

- "Casablanca" (film)
- "Notorious" (film)
- "Doctor Zhivago" (film)
- "Schindler's List" (film)
- "Judgment at Nuremberg" (film)
- "A Hidden Life" (film)

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When I began this saga I thought I would have relatively little to say. As I wrote, however, I came to realize—for the first time—how much my Jewish identity has influenced my choices, my interests, and my beliefs. I am grateful I have had this opportunity and I look forward to continuing the discussion with each of you.

Iris Comens Rotberg

June, 2020