

A HUMBLE AND HUMBLING PASSOVER EXPERIENCE

Rivka Weinstein

The call I had dreaded for months came seven days before Passover. I was in the middle of emptying dozens of shopping bags in my New Jersey home, filled with goodies for Passover when my father called to alert me that my mother had taken a turn for the worse. We did not know if she would live another day, or maybe a couple of days, or maybe a week. Only G-d knew how much time was left. What I knew was that I had to catch a plane to Germany immediately--Passover or not--to be with my mother. Originally, my husband Ed and I were to host Passover for the first time in our home; a much anticipated event that I had looked forward to and planned for months now. I was to go to Germany to see my mother the day after Passover. But, as we say in German, humans plan, G-d steers.

My then seven month old daughter Aviva and I were on our way to the airport an hour and a half after I hung up with my father. My husband would stay at home and await word from me. Knowing I would have to spend Passover in Germany, in a small town with no synagogue or any kosher stores nearby, I took the essentials I thought I would really need: Three boxes of matza, a jar of jam, a can of coconut macaroons for a little treat, a small bottle of Kiddush wine, my travel candle sticks, and a Hagaddah. Because German food ingredients are strictly supervised and clearly labeled, I was sure I could buy dairy products that would be acceptable and of course vegetables and potatoes would be no problem either. For dishes I would simply use disposables and devised a plan to kasher the second stove and set up an area for myself. Looking back, it surprises me that I had the strength to consider Passover, as I was packing for a trip which I knew would be a farewell to my mother forever. But I did.

Thank G-d, my mother was still alive when we arrived in Germany, and seeing us seemed to give her wind under her wings. We were able to spend time together. Her cancer had ravished her body, but not her mind or her ability to smile. Passover came nearer with every day, and I was wondering what to do. I would not go to Frankfurt or Cologne for Seders, because I wanted to be within walking distance of my mother, and not "stuck" out of reach.

I was able to get everything I needed for the Seder plate--substituting a beet for the shank bone. So we had our Seder. Because of my mother's poor state of health, we kept to the mandatory essentials of the Seder like remembering the Exodus from Egypt and eating the bread of affliction. Our *Shulchan Aruch*--the festive meal--consisted of spring potatoes, lox, and scrambled eggs with chives. Not quite the meal I had planned for our Seder at home in the States with turkey and brisket and "wonderful" flourless desserts. But, nevertheless, a Seder it was.

The same night, in the middle of the night, my father received a call from the hospital that my mother had peacefully died. My father was in great distress. After four decades together, being left behind had not seemed possible to him, even after months of eventually unsuccessful chemotherapies through which he had to see her suffer. When Silke, my mother's pastor (I am a Jew by choice) came to our house a while later, she comforted him by saying "Juergen, remember, tonight was the bread of affliction, when it is said that, 'now we are slaves but tomorrow we are free.' Anne is free now."

I was stunned; this was certainly not what I had expected her to say. When the funeral day had to be set, it was Pastor Silke who pointed out that Shabbos would be very difficult for me. My father agreed and because of a national holiday in Germany my mother was not buried until the eighth day of Passover. I was worried about what songs and prayers my husband and I would hear, but, no matter what, there was no way I was not attending my mother's funeral. She had been so supportive of my chosen faith and such a positive power in my life. How could I not be there? Well, my mother surprised me one more time by her love and foresight. She had in fact chosen the songs

and prayers for her service and made sure I could be there. There was only talk of G-d--nothing and no one else. I will be forever grateful for her ability to reach beyond herself.

But I think there is something more to learn here beyond tolerance, outreach and a mother's love: Passover does not have to be the expensive, lavish affair it often turns into. It does not have to cost hundreds of dollars. In fact, I am convinced that here, less is truly more. Maybe my experience was a little too bare bones--after all, it is a joyous celebration. But the experience will help me keep things in check. "Duck sauce?! I don't buy it all year, why do I put it in the cart because it's kosher for Passover?" These thoughts are my guide as I am again in the middle of planning and preparing for the first Weinstein family Seder in our home, G-d willing.

In loving memory of Anita "Anne" Schulz, ob"m.

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"Well, I guess that covers the basics for Passover in Germany."



