

Today, how could I not dream of being in my
paternal grandmother's kitchen.

The roasting, cooking, and making would be intense.

My grandmother Janka, as Grand Maestro conducting
her daughter Rozsa, assorted sisters and their daughters.

Easily six, maybe more in her kitchen, working to create
a masterpiece meal.

The chopping, slicing, paring, sorting and washing,
taking out and putting away,
placement, preparation,
the small, significant decisions of each step,
repeated over a lifetime
which happen automatically, precisely, exactly,
with such total assurance, conviction, that the act of the decision,
the carrying it to completion is so ingrained, repeated thousands of times
the knowing how much salt to add, where to make the cut, the slice, knife skill
becomes unconscious.

The apples, honey, raisins, the exact blend for Charoset.
The color of the onions, the smell which tells how it tastes,
matzo balls able to float in soup, the stirring to the right consistency,
the mixing, knowing when it's done, exactly ready,
timing, timing, hot staying hot, timing,
all becomes part of who we are, what we do,
how we make things happen, how we create.
The thousands of unconscious decisions made necessary for creating
the masterpiece meal.
My grandmother Janka orchestrating.

This meal served at the long table, dressed in crisp, clean linen,
with the finest china, crystal and silver, as beautiful buttons and sparkling ornaments
to her pressed linen dress.

Wine, matzo, *maror*, food telling our story sprung from slavery
leaving captivity knowing again freedom, tasting sweet, bitter, salt.
The familiarity and easiness of family, *Csalad*, *Mishpacha*, relatives.
Dressed finely as the table. Happy to be together.
Grateful for this yearly time to hear our story, share our story, tell our story,
our family Haggadah.
We taste together, eat and drink together, enjoy and laugh together,
speak and share together.
Eating the masterpiece orchestrated by my grandmother.

This meal made year after year, passed down mother to daughter,
father to son, generation one Jew to the next, each partaking of Tradition.
Knowledge of Liberation, Divine Intervention, Compassion,
Awareness of Misfortune, Gratitude for Freedom.
Gratitude for Life. Sharing Awareness, Happiness, Hope.

My grandmother at this table, before Hitler, before losing husband,
son, sisters, brother, nieces, nephews, before the Ghetto,
before needless death, before mass insanity, mass insanity, war,
before leaving all she knew, before her long, deep depression.
My grandmother vital, alive, passionate, sure, knowing,
supremely capable.
My grandmother, who I never knew.

[My paternal grandmother Janka (Sonnenschein) Gutlohn, lived in Budapest, surrounded by her
children and large loving family until my father was placed in a forced labor camp in 1941; and my
uncle, her oldest son, also in forced labor, never returned from the Russian front. She survived the
Ghetto in Budapest and emigrated to Israel with her daughter, my aunt Rozsa. In Israel, she
suffered a long, drawn out depression until her death in 1961 at the age of 84.]

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