Poetry, Wigs, & Learning:

The Strands of Claire Grunwald's Life

AS TOLD TO Nechamie Margolis

SHE CREATES SHEITELS by day and poetry by night, both forming the fabric of who she is. One of the oldest names in the wig business, her career as founder of Claire Accuhair in Brooklyn, New York, has its roots in a DP camp in Germany when she was 13 years old. She still runs her successful business today, and during her more than eight decades of life, she has never stopped questioning, never stopped learning and growing.

Meet Claire Grunwald, who says, "I'm grateful for the plenty in this country, but sorrowful that we don't seem satisfied or happy."

Photo: Levi Teitelbaum



Warm

It's warm; the yard smells of horses and poultry all over
My Aunt Aidele is calling for Andrew the farm hand
He is sleeping under the berry tree
Chickens are walking on his belly
We are giggling and watching behind the bushes
Waiting for Andrew to wake up and sweep corn and chickens off his belly
Aunt Aidele is angry but I spy a smile in the corner of her eye as we kids scatter away
The wheels of time are spinning and spinning like a reel of film
Aunt Aidele and the farm are gone now, but sweet memories of fun
And warmth linger as I peek through a keyhole to my childhood.

Childhood

This is a poem I wrote about the warmest memories of my childhood, which I spent on my aunt's farm outside the city of Debrecen, Hungary, where I was born in 1932. My father's sister was childless and I was her little queen when I visited their village in the summer. Even more than I loved being at home, I loved being there, with the horse, the garden where we picked our own vegetables, and chicken and geese everywhere. And of course there was lazy Andrew who loved to sleep under the tree, and never felt us dropping kernels of corn on his stomach. Watching those chickens walk over him, gobbling up the corn, was the finest form of entertainment.

I was a lazy child who loved nothing more than to read day and night, sneaking a book under the table at Shabbos meals when I could get away with it. We lived directly across the street from school. There were three bells. When the first one rang, we needed to be in the school building; when the second rang, in our classroom; and when the third bell rang, sitting at our desk, arms folded. I jumped out of bed when the second bell rang, and always made it to class on time.

I loved my five sisters, even though I was considered the ugly duckling with my red hair and freckles. They were book smart, and I was the dreamer who never paid attention in school. It didn't bother me; I just figured you didn't have to be smart or pretty to be happy.

I was the third child and when the younger ones had to go to sleep, I was considered a younger child; when it came time to wash the dishes, I was old enough to help out.

There wasn't much entertainment besides reading, and communication was either in person or through letter writing. My grandmother asked me to read to her while she sewed or did other household chores, so my Hungarian rapidly improved and I learned to read and write well. Hebrew was another story. I struggled with learning Hebrew and each Shabbos when my mother told me to read the Shabbos prayers, I read them in the Hungarian translation. Suspicious that I finished so fast, my mother asked if I read every word. I was able to answer yes in all honesty, but it didn't do anything to improve my Hebrew skills! And that is why I'm always the last one to finish davening in shul, even today.

My mother was a strong woman and we were too similar in temperament and coloring for me to be her favorite child. My father was a chossid of the old Satmar Rebbe but he never traveled to him on Yom Tov because the border between Romania and Hungary was closed. He was strictly religious and very chassidish, and we weren't allowed to question anything about Yiddishkeit. I was told G-d was everywhere and sees everything. I was petrified of Him and what would happen to me because of all the rules I didn't always keep.

Although my father was tough, I felt his deep love for us. One of my favorite memories is singing the zemiros on Shabbos with him. We

had no boys in our family and all six of us girls sang the zemiros together with my father. My sister Breindel had a very good voice and my sisters told me I didn't sing well. I didn't care, and sang anyway.

My parents traveled a lot. They went to fairs to buy merchandise to resell. They bought material to make clothing for the peasants of our city, and when they traveled, we stayed with the maid. My older sister helped take care of us all, and my grandfather who lived down the block came every day to help.

Although we had a live-in maid, it wasn't like having a maid today. She mainly took care of the heavy cleaning and laundry that had to be washed by hand. We only had two bedrooms and we slept two to a bed. The maid slept in the kitchen. We had a big table built like a box that pulled apart. The maid kept all her things inside the table, and slept inside there at night. Debrecen was a big city with a hospital, so we often had family members of the patients sleeping in our house. When we had guests, we gave them our bed, and slept on blankets on the floor.

We always had enough to eat, but there was none of the incredible variety we see today in the supermarket. I'm amazed when I see children asking for electronics and other expensive gadgets in exchange for finding the afikomen. I remember my sister asked for a hard-boiled egg for finding the afikomen. Jealously, wistfully, we watched her finish it to the very last drop. Every Pesach I tell this story to my grandchildren and now great-grandchildren. I'm grateful for the plenty in this country, but sorrowful that we don't seem satisfied or happy. It's important to remember the past, and feel hunger for Torah, instead of luxuries.

In Landau's Supermarket

At a Brooklyn supermarket
I meander down the aisle.
All is kosher, all is well kept
And I wonder and I smile.
This place is the horn of plenty
In volume and variety
The assortment is uncanny
I shop without anxiety.
The meat section has beef and duck
Chicken and brains and tongue and liver
And flanken and ribs and chuck—
Hashem surely is a Giver!
Here vegetables free of vermin
With a rabbi's guarantee
Fruits and sodas of every "min"
Cans of tuna, coffee and tea.
Rice cakes, ice cream—ten of a kind!
Large eggs, small eggs and medium
Whatever you seek you can find!
Chocolates and sweets ad nauseum.
As I see my full shopping cart
An old memory comes to mind
Like a vicious stab in my heart
As present and past is combined.
At the Pesach seder way back
In Hungary in '44
From my Grandfather with great knack
My sister... with care she did score
Stole the afikomen and then
For the ransom she didn't beg
A dress, a doll, a fancy pen
She just asked for a hard-boiled egg
And she ate it with decorum
Wistfully, we watched her eat
Finishing, not leaving a crumb
An egg! Those days a kingly treat.
I'm grateful, yet sorrowful
In this land of glut and plenty
With our eyes and stomachs full
Are we satisfied and happy?
Let's not forget all the lean years.
Remember our vicious foes.
Remember, too, as Moshiach nears
Luxuries, pleasures, won't eliminate our woes.
We'll feel hunger for the Torah
So I have heard the scriptures say.
Our souls will dance the hora
How I long to see that day!



Photo: Levi Teitelbaum

War Years

I was twelve years old in 1944 when all the Jews in Debrecen were forced into a ghetto. Our home was within the ghetto boundaries so my aunt with her nine children moved in with us. We all slept all over the house on the floor. Once there was an air raid so we all ran to the basement. When the all-clear sounded we discovered that not a single bomb had fallen in the ghetto. So the next time they blew the air raid siren, all the non-Jews ran into the ghetto!

But then my father was drafted together with all the able-bodied men to the munkatabor, the forced labor division of the Hungarian army. The women and children and the remaining men were all herded into a brick factory, where we slept on the floor without pillows or blankets for the next two weeks.

The Germans next herded us into cattle cars, 80 people to a car. For five days, the train meandered between Poland and Hungary. My family was lucky enough to have secured a place under one of the high windows. While others moaned and groaned below, I stood on top of a pile of packages, looking out the window. Debrecen lies on the plains. I'd never seen a mountain in my life till then, and enjoyed the view and beautiful sunsets. Although there was hunger and thirst and the embarrassment of eliminating in front of other people, I was mesmerized by that gorgeous view!

We didn't know at that time why our train turned away from Auschwitz at the last moment and went to Strasshof. Only later did we discover the feverish negotiations between Adolph Eichmann, ym"s, and the Jewish leadership in Budapest which resulted in our life-saving detour.

When we first boarded the cattle cars, they made an announcement that elderly people and big families with a lot of children should go into one group, and smaller families into another. My aunt urged my mother to sneak into the group of smaller families.

"They probably have better working conditions for smaller families," she said.

"I'm not going anywhere," said my mother. "I go where Hashem leads me."

That emunah in Hashem served us well. The transport with smaller families went straight to the ovens. Our transport was diverted to Strasshof. It was no picnic, but there were no gas chambers there.

When we first arrived, we were stripped of all our clothes and left that way all day until we were deloused. The Germans ordered the most religious-looking man to carry things in and out of the area all day, to add to our humiliation and shame.

Strasshof was surrounded by a big forest and it wasn't difficult to go through the fence. There was a man in our camp who knew all about mushrooms and which ones were poisonous. Those mushrooms he found for us probably saved our lives, but it was many, many years before I could look another mushroom in the face.

Strasshof was a transient lager, and one day a few of us were chosen to pick peas on a nearby farm. We were lucky, because on the farm we could get food. My clearest memory was the lunch the farmer gave us on a certain day. It was hot potatoes spread thickly with butter. I didn't eat it. I had just turned twelve and it was a fast day, so although I was so hungry I didn't eat. I regretted it later whenever I thought of that lunch of potatoes and butter. Even today, I can still picture that lunch I didn't eat.

The farm work lasted a very short while. My mother, my sisters, my cousins, and I were taken to work in Mosbirbaum, an oil refinery. We slept in a big room filled with triple bunk beds. My family arrived first and took the three corners, the best beds in the room, with the most privacy. Another transport of Jews soon arrived, assimilated Hungarians who mocked us for being frum and hated us for taking the best

places in the room.

At night I talked to my assimilated, "enlightened," roommates. I loved logic and my sixth-grade education and my sheltered home environment didn't prepare me to answer the unanswerable questions. My new atheist acquaintances filled my mind with ideas like the Big Bang. "Moses was a very smart man and wrote the Torah himself," they said.

When I talked about G-d they laughed at me. "Are you crazy?" they said. "A loving, all-powerful G-d would let you come here?"

I'd been asking myself the same question.

Yet, I couldn't completely believe in either theology. I struggled with emunah but I couldn't not believe in Hashem the way I was taught. I continued to observe all my obligations but resentfully. It took years before I could reconcile all the questions and theories I grappled with. Luckily, I started studying Torah later in life with Rabbi Shimon Kessin, a follower of Luzzato. After years of studying I began to appreciate creation and my place in it.

The Greatest Architect

How intricate, elegant, and precise
And complicated is this universe of ours!
Each molecule, each grain of sand
Organized exactly where to stand and bend.
According to an awesome super design
Where balance, logic, and beauty intertwine
Nothing is random, nothing's out of place
The structure of the atom, the might of the human race.
And the countless species within seas so deep
The smoking volcano, the tallest mountain peak
The snowflakes each different, no two of them alike
Yet, becoming one glowing blanket, as each of them alight.
The structure of the planets as they orbit the sun
The conception of a creature as new life is begun
Could all this exist by chance, without a supreme Hand?
According to new science it all started with "The Big Bang"
All this built at random? Without any plan?
Then abandoned, in one lump, flora, fauna, and man.
Friend, never believe it. For the thought is callous
To maintain Creation, Hashem is always with us
The construction is ongoing, the blueprint is the Torah
Perfection is His desire, the goal is olom haba
Look around you, and observe, miracles without end
The majesty of creation is not just "The Big Bang"!
Nature, science and the Torah embodied in one
Only by Hashem alone can all these things be done
Mercy, love, and beauty are His holy ways
May we see the redemption by Moshiach speedily in our days!
Amen.



Photo: Levi Teitelbaum

Liberation

A year after we were deported to Strasshof, we were loaded together with the other Jews from Debrecen on trains headed to Theresienstadt. We settled into the train and only a short while later, the Russians blew up the tracks, so we returned to Strasshof. This saved our lives.

Two weeks later, the Russians liberated Strasshof. They were almost as bad as the Germans. They violated our women and because we didn't speak or understand Russian, they treated us as if we were the enemy.

With a lot of difficulty and hardships, we made our way to Budapest. People stared when they saw my old grandparents and us little children. "Old people, children? Where were you?"

That's when we found out about Auschwitz and the atrocities committed there.

We met someone from Debrecen who told my aunt, "Your husband is home and he fixed up a beautiful apartment for you."

"What about my husband?" my mother asked.

"He's not home yet," the man replied.

I went outside and cried. I knew instinctively that my father was dead.

Back in Debrecen, my mother went to meet every train that came in, looking for her husband.

On Yom Kippur, she was crying in shul when a woman approached her.

"You know already?"

"Know what?"

"That your Yossel is dead. Isn't that why you're crying?"

It turns out that everyone knew but nobody had the heart to tell my mother. He had perished from starvation. As a devout chossid and talmid chacham, he had refused to eat treif food, and at the end, he had no reserves.

My father and my sister Goldie, a year younger than me, perished in the Holocaust; the rest of us girls and my mother survived.

My mother was a strong woman. After this terrible blow she decided to bring the family to America, where my father's sister Sara lived. We would depart from Budapest. I was 13 years old and living in a hachsharah at the time- a Mizrachi training center where they prepared us to make aliyah to Israel.

I wasn't an easy child and my mother knew I would refuse to come with them to America. So she sent a message to me to come to Budapest to see the family and then I would make aliyah. I sold my blanket and made my way to Budapest, arriving before my family did. Budapest was bombed, with very little electricity and running water and I soon became ill, and lay in the hospital hungry and miserable, all alone. Then one day my sister showed up, carrying griven and potatoes, chicken and liver. Emotionally overcome, I decided at that moment, I don't care where they go, I'll never leave the family. So I accompanied them as they illegally crossed the border into Germany where we waited for visas to America. We lived in a D.P. camp in Fuerth, Germany.

I was 13 years old and spent my days doing nothing. There were very few children in the camp as most hadn't survived. The few children there were children who had been hidden for the six years of the war; they had not been going to school and so knew next to nothing. I came from a home where I read Shakespeare and all that high-falutin' stuff and I couldn't sit for hours with children just learning to read and write.

My aunt, who had immigrated to America years before, wrote to my mother that there were no sheitel machers in America and it would be good if one of us sisters learned the trade. There was an opening for an apprentice in a gentile hair salon in Nuremberg, which was an hour away by train. I was artistic and good with my hands and my mother sent me as an apprentice. I resented it very much as I had to wake up early and I missed lunch which was the main meal of the day, but little did I know how much this apprenticeship would affect the path I took in life.

For three years I learned every-

thing about the wig making business, from processing raw hair to making a complete wig.

When we finally got our visas to America four years later in 1949, my aunt, Sara Merling, took me to her wigmaker, Madame Marie on Fifth Avenue in New York City. She immediately offered me a job, and I was employed only a week after arriving in America.

America and Marriage

After arriving in America, all I wanted to do was fall in love and get married. I didn't want a typical shidduch and together with my friends I walked to the FDR Drive on Friday nights where the boys congregated. Most of them were survivors and I found a few dates that way.

"In America you're an old maid if you're not married by 20," my aunt Sara told me. I was already 19, so the pressure was on. Sara tried to trick me into a shidduch. She sent her daughter Naomi to fetch me.

"Mama wants to go shopping with you. Get dressed quickly," she told me.

When I got to her house, there was some guy sitting in her living room talking about the Holocaust. I didn't want to talk about that. So I changed the topic. He listened politely and after a moment went right back to talking about the Holocaust. Picking up a comic book from the table I read quietly until he got the message and left.

After a while I had enough. The boys I liked didn't like me. If I didn't have a date, my friends felt sorry for me. If I had a date and he didn't ask me out again, then I felt terrible. And if I dated at all, my mother wouldn't speak to me for three days because she felt the boys weren't religious enough.

"Mama, I'm ready for a shidduch date," I said.

Delighted, she found someone for me. But my mother had such a good time talking with him when he came to pick me up, she forgot to walk out. He wanted to take me to the movies, but we couldn't leave because of my mother. He never came back.

Next, my mother found Moishe Grunwald. He was a grandchild of the Arugas Habosem and the nephew of the Tzelemer Rebbe, a big family from Tzecho that was sometimes Czechoslovakia, sometimes Poland. Moishe's maternal grandfather was the mayor of the city.

"Mama, this time don't sit there like he's coming to see you," I told my mother.

Moishe was very quiet. I talked and talked and talked.

"How do you like the boy?" Aunt Sara asked.

"Aunt Sara, he doesn't say a word," I complained.

"Oy, your uncle Shaya likes to talk a lot and I love to talk a lot. You will be so happy if you marry a man who lets you talk!" said Aunt Sara.

After three months of dating, Moishe was too shy to pop the question as we sat on a bench in the park.

"What do you think of the future?" he said.

"The future? I hope to go boating in Central Park."

"No, not that future," he said nervously.

"You want to propose marriage?" I asked.

"Yes!"

"So ask for my hand!"

Moishe asked and I accepted. I waited three or four days before telling my family the news because they had tortured me so much about not being married.

Moishe later told me he had loved me at first sight. And after almost 61 years of marriage, I still do most of the talking.

Breakfast Thoughts

We are having breakfast and my thoughts meander
Looking at my beloved, and my thoughts are tender.
And I'm thinking: Oh! What could be on his mind?
As his breakfast he eats, what thoughts would I there find?
Wed over fifty years, quietly we sit there.
His eyes are far away, mine are on him with care.
And as I sit and think, years of past come to mind.
With kindness, peace or strife; all that is left far behind.
So we quietly eat with our own thoughts busy.
What could be on his mind? The answer is easy.
Nothing complicated, the man has no guile.
His thoughts must be of me... and I give him a smile.
And his sweet face brightens, gratefully his eyes shine.
And I thank Hashem for making this man all mine.



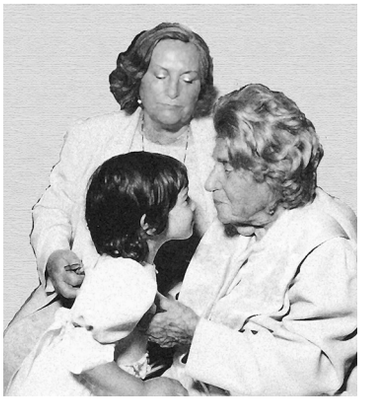








Clockwise from top left: 1) Top row, L-R: Claire, sister Breindu. Second row, L-R: Sister Binu, mother Rochel Leah, sister Chanie. This photo was taken in 1947. 2) Claire with oldest daughter Chaya Goldish. 3) Claire and daughters, rehearsing for a musical comedy for tzedakah. L-R: Silky Pitterman, Claire Grunwald, Chanie Handler, Chaya Goldish. 4) Claire teaching children about wigs on Career Day in Bais Yaakov of Midwood, in 2010. 5) Claire (in background), Claire's mother Rochel Leah Berkowitz with great-grandchild Sarah Fradel Handler, in 1999. 6) Silky Pitterman with her parents Claire and Moishe Grunwald, in 2006.



Children

My husband was drafted to the Korean War some months after we were married. My pregnancy with my first daughter Chaya saved him from the war; they released him from the draft when she was born.

Our second child, also a girl, was born only two months after my husband's aunt, the Tzelemer Rebbetzin, passed away without any children [see I Was Touched, this issue – Ed.]. My father's sister Fraidel, in whose house I spent my childhood summers, had also passed away without ever having children. We named our baby Silka Fraidel after both these righteous and gracious women.

I went into labor on a snowy Chanukah night (which happened to be

December 25) with my third daughter, Chana Goldie. We lived on Utica Avenue and Eastern Parkway. We didn't have a car, so Moishe went outside to Eastern Parkway to hail a cab. But it was X-mas Eve and there were no cabs in sight. Finally, after a long wait, he found one. However, a non-Jew tried to claim the cab as well. A fight broke out, and my quiet, refined husband battled for the car. Moishe broke his glasses, but he got the car! That was a highlight for me; it wasn't his nature to fight, but he did what he had to do for his wife.

We have three children: Chaya, Silka Fradel, and Chana Goldie. My one regret was not having more children, since my girls are all so wonderful. In retrospect, raising children was hard but worth it, and each child brings its own mazel.

When my children were small I worked very hard to make ends meet. I had no help in the house, and made most of the kids' clothing. My husband brought in a decent salary but I had expensive taste and was a perfectionist. I often dreamed of wealth and ease, and that was when I wrote the following poem.

The Messenger

Oh, if I had riches galore
So much that I wouldn't want more
Oh how happy I would be
I'd give so much to charity
I'd invest in Brooklyn a lot
In Boro Park a parking lot
A Yeshiva for all welcome
Regardless of brains or income
All the Rabbanim qualified
Their salaries dignified
A grand palace for Jews to mingle
And free shadchanim for the single
I'd donate for the poor and sickly
Hoping they will get well quickly
End all Israeli poverty
Buy back from Yishmael our property
And to my friends and family
I'd show great generosity
I'd give myself too a small gift
Join a health club, get a face lift
Oh! All the things I could do!
I'd share my wealth with you and you
G-d, am I asking you a lot?
You see that selfish I am not
You gave the Reichmans and Bill Gates
Please let me know what it takes
For I wish for, and I offer
To become your shliach proper.



Business

I never planned on having a sheitel business- it's not easy to deal with women!

Like a swan, her neck bowed and bent, here and there
Scrutinizing her hairstyle critically.
She messed my work, here and there,
And I, her beautician, silently gritted my teeth,
As I looked on smiling.

But after I got married in 1951, no one could ever set my sheitel the way I wanted. I tried one person after another, but they all made me look so old and matronly. Finally, I bought myself a "head" and paraphernalia and set my own sheitel in the same style I had set my own hair as a girl. I didn't have much experience in setting as I'd learned wig making, not styling, but soon all my friends, and friends of friends, were asking me to do it for them. Before I knew it, I found myself in business. Eventually, I went to beauty school and got licensed, but my real education was my apprenticeship in Nuremberg.

In the 1950's there weren't more than five wig makers in Brooklyn, but that didn't matter because there were very few people who wore sheitels. Hats were the style of choice, and sheitels were expensive. They cost $150 which was equivalent to a month and a half

salary for most people. Things changed completely in the 1960's. Hats went out of style and the big bouffant hairstyle came on the scene. The Double-Bubble and the Beehive required mountains of hair which most people didn't have, and even non-Jews began to wear wigs. Many Jewish women whose commitment to covering their hair was weak began to wear wigs, most of them never taking it off even after styles changed. It was the heyday of the wig business!

Technology also played a direct role in Jewish women covering their hair. There were no synthetics until the early 1960's. Many ultra-religious women who wouldn't wear human hair wigs wore wigs made from animal hair called pel. Most wigs were made from human hair which was very expensive to process. But in the early 1960's mass production of synthetic wigs brought down the price for the first time, so wigs were affordable for the average woman.

Some of my customers were young women who were more religious than their parents. They begged me to make their sheitels as natural as possible so their mothers wouldn't hassle them about it. I remember some of these mothers complaining that they didn't understand what they did wrong that their daughters wanted to wear a wig! They didn't realize how lucky they were that their daughters chose to live a life filled with mitzvos.

My business started small, and I worked out of our little apartment on Eastern Parkway and Utica. As my business grew, we moved to a bigger place on Kingston Avenue, and then President Street. Eventually my business got too big for one person to run and I moved to Coney Island Avenue in Midwood where we bought a building and lived on top of the store.

Until my children got married, I always worked in the place that we lived. In this way, I was always home for my children after school. I helped them with their homework, spent time with them, and we always ate dinner together as a family. I did not allow myself to become consumed by work. Though I enjoyed working and needed parnassah, I knew what my priorities were.

My husband was in the jewelry business but I eventually convinced him to leave that business and join mine to become the business manager of Claire Accuhair. As time went on, I adapted my business to change with the times and the styles and created beautiful custom sheitels for my customers.

Everything is from Hashem and there is a reason for everything, even the concentration camps. My philosophy is that Hashem has plenty of money, and He can give us whatever He wants. The only reason He wants us to get jobs and open businesses is so we can show him how straight we are in our dealings, how kind and honest we can be when our money and time are at stake.

Do what Hashem gave you a talent to do. If you do what you love, it is not a job, and not a chore, but something you enjoy. Anyway you will always only get the parnassah that Hashem has in store for you. I have always tried to treat my customers right, and to be a perfectionist when I am taking money from someone for a wig. I now have a reputation that I can rely on. That is why I have my clientele by word of mouth, not some fancy, expensive advertising campaign.

Claire's Business Rules

Of my work I never tire
I train the people that I hire.
I also employ my mishpachah
This business is run "al pi halachah."
For parnassah is heaven sent
To Hashem we don't pay rent.
Riches to give He has galore
He would gladly give us more!
Business and wealth is a test
For kindness, honesty and the rest.
I am a true perfectionist
On the best workmanship I insist.
For rich or poor I only care
That my wigs should be beyond compare.
To excellence I do adhere.
These are the rules at
Claire Accuhair.
Philosophy

Spirituality

Even after I moved to America, got married, raised a family and started a business, the questions raised by the assimilated Jews in the camps gave me no peace. On the outside I did all the right things. I covered my hair, observed the expected rituals, but my soul was not at rest, with my mind struggling against unanswerable questions.

Then my daughter brought me to a shiur by Rabbi Shimon Kessin. I kept going back, and it affected my thinking and changed my whole life. I learned hashkafah from Rabbi Kessin for 17 years and the change in me was dramatic. Very simply, before I didn't believe in Hashem 100 percent and now I do. I had to work hard to get to where I am today and at 82 years old I'm still growing and working. After all, that's what we're here for.

Until I was 13 years old, I only met two kinds of Jews: religious, like us, or not. But all were Hungarians. When we came to America in 1949 we tried to blend in, tried to look more American, more like modern Jews. We were laughed at because we were looking for kosher food. Then I wanted to not stand out; today I am a proud Jew.

The world has changed a lot since the 1950s when we were made fun of because we were "old-fashioned." Thank G-d the tide is turning. Jews are returning in large numbers. There are many different kiruv organizations but in my opinion the strongest, the most widespread, and the best organized is Chabad Lubavitch. I appreciate the sacrifice of the Shluchim who move out to their place of Shlichus not for a year or two or three, but for life! Or as one put it, "We're here until Moshiach comes."

I was on business in Russia after the Iron Curtain fell. Even there I found Chabad and they provided me with kosher food. All around the world Chabad brings the light of Torah into the deepest darkness. Thank you, Chabad! ■

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Mirror, Mirror

Looking in the mirror, whom do I see?
My whole family is gazing back at me
I was shocked when fatigued and in pain
I saw my late mother's sweet face again
Sister Binah I see when I'm concerned,
And Breindu when proud, for praises well-earned.
Waxing philosophic, with bowed head
I see my sister Chanie, reflected.
When I am sad I even resemble you,
Beautiful, melancholy sister Tzivyu.
Strange how physically alike we are
Yet each of us unique in nature by far.
The DNA does etch our features
With the will of G-d, we are His creatures.
Designed to all was thusly dictated
When our Universe Hashem created
And as we go on in the journey called life
For generations in war, pain and strife.
And man's life seems shorter than a blink
But our descendants are our life's link.
For as I see the face of my great-grandchild
Lovingly I am awed, amazed, beguiled
For in her lovely face, whom do I see?
The face of my mother, my sisters and me.