

# Midlife Musical Musings

## How Memories are Made



**Miriam Hendeles**



Chanukah is coming and we look forward to family get-togethers between grandparents and their grandchildren and the accompanying cousins and siblings. Chanukah is a time of hope, happiness, light, and latkes when we mingle with various family generations. We tell the story of the Chanukah miracle and we light the candles.

I think of the elders and children and those generations in between sharing and exchanging stories, experiences, art, gelt, chocolate, and lots of music. Listening, hearing, reflecting, and learning from one another's experiences.

***"As the sandwich generation, let's make sure we don't miss the chance – whether formally or informally - to have these important conversations with the older generations. And with that knowledge, let's share with our grandkids our values and heritage, and let's glean wisdom from our elders."***

As Abie Rotenberg's "Memories" song from "Journeys, Vol 2" goes:

*"What will become of all the memories?  
Are they to scatter with the dust in the breeze?"*

*And who will stand before the world knowing what to say?*

*When the very last survivor....fades away..."*

Some are on the sidelines, listening, and need to be drawn out and engaged in conversation. Others try to reminisce and no one really listens. Or even worse, no one asks.

Now that I'm in the category of "grandparent" for some time now, I note the value of sharing and listening. Regardless, whatever role I take in storytelling, story listening, or bystander, I'm more sensitive to time passing. My desire to capture the moments in speech, pictures, songs, or prose is more intense.

As a child, I was one of the few who had grandparents. Most of my friends' Bubbies and Zeides had passed in the Holocaust, and my friends' parents emigrated to the US to start new families. My grandparents each survived the War and traveled to the U.S. with their children - my parents - in the late 1930s and early 40s respectively.

Many of my friends tell me that they didn't grow up hearing stories about the Holocaust from their survivor parents. Aside from the stamp that their parents had on their arms indicating the years in concentration camps, there was little proof that they had experienced atrocities. These survivors were reticent to share their horror stories with their children and grandchildren.

Some open up more willingly. In his later years, my father-in-law who passed in 2001, freely shared stories of how he and his brother escaped from Poland, while my husband and his siblings lapped up these stories.

Children ask a lot of questions but adults don't always want to prod. They may wonder: Do the elders really want to talk? Are their memories accurate? Is this act of eliciting reminiscence really for their catharsis or therapeutic benefit? Or is it for us - so we can record it all for posterity? How do we know if we are being sensitive to their needs?

My father z"l and my mother (till 120) were/are Holocaust survivors. The story that sticks out in my memory is my father telling us bedtime stories about his childhood in Antwerp before the war. A few years before his passing, my brothers recorded him as he spoke on tape about some of the more fascinating escape stories - leaving Belgium, France, and coming to the USA.

As the sandwich generation, let's make sure we don't miss the chance – whether formally or informally - to have these important conversations with the older generations. And with that knowledge, let's share with our grandkids our values and heritage, and let's glean wisdom from our elders. Later we may regret those missed moments and conversations. A message of Chanukah is to delve into our memories to benefit ourselves and the next generation.


Take out a pen and paper, pull out the phone's recording app, and document our parents' or grandparents' voices. Then take those thoughts and consider writing down your own memories. Make a collage or scrapbook using old pictures. Interview them, tape them, and send a link to the memories to the cousins.

Back to Abie Rotenberg:

*"There's nothing I can say or do to make this change..."*

*Time as a way of passing by so fast...*

*and like a fleeting shadow, now one will recall...the faces of the past..."*

Whatever generation you're part of – Baby Boom, Gen X, Millennial, or Gen Z, there's so much to learn from each other. Know that and act upon it. Your grandchildren will thank you for it. 

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