

Preparing for Yom Kippur

by Mel Patrell Furman

Panes of sunlight fall around my hands on the morning counter as I begin the meal we will eat before fasting. For dessert, Tante Etta's special German plum torte, the sticky dough protesting into a pan burnt with caramel, a dark blade halving and pitting sweet plums for the top. At her husband's shiva years ago, she promised to teach me, electing me plumcake heiress for the simple pleasure of disinheriting some other misbegotten in-law in training.

Tante Etta, a mountain of a Berliner, sits in my kitchen. Voice guttural with the smoke of thousands of cigarettes, accent undiminished through thirty years of exile, Her suffering, her kindness feeding scraps to children locked in joyless Berlin, her hard-earned spite. She swears like a sailor Or a woman left barren by circumstance.

As if Etta's large and heavy soul
Has left a tear in the membrane that separates them,
The dead begin to drift into my home, as various
as snowflakes but not evanescent; they accumulate.
Their silenced voices bid us to speak words of joy
Their dessicated hands and empty kitchens beg us to bake.
When it is time to dress for dinner
I stagger upstairs under a foggy blanket of lead.

As I stand at my dresser, their jewelry cries out to me.
My grandmother's aquamarine earrings, which she swore
had held diamonds until the family ran out of food.
The sapphire bracelet I cannot latch myself
Reminds me of helping Nonna dress for Poppy's funeral,
Putting on her necklace, zipping up her dress.
Aunt Rita's bracelet, long promised to me, weighs
Down my arms with chiming charms whose meanings I forget.

A cardinal sings in the still-green leaves, hoping for his mate.
Left in the drawer is my mother-in-law's gold bangle,
Still strange to me. One day my daughter will wear it,
Standing tall, her shoulders braced against the weight
of all her gold, the plum cake recipe strung around her neck
like a dog tag, a yellow star, or a badge of honor.

Mel Patrell Furman is a Jew by choice and a member of the Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation of Evanston, Illinois. She studied poetry writing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Iowa Summer Writers Festival.

Landlord to such a Multitude

*How fair are your tents, O Jacob?
Your dwelling places, O Israel? (Numbers 24:5)*

by Sue Swartz

Sue Swartz teaches diversity and social change at Indiana University, leads Jewish prayer & ritual, runs a well-oiled household, and writes poetry.

(Inside me, a house.)

In my house,
King David plucks his lonesome harp
& Queen Esther prances in royal robes.
The newly freed burst into song.
A young man in long black coat shuckles
while another young man cradles a spent Uzi,
and Emma Goldman gathers up crumbs
of manna in my house. Sallow-eyed survivors
sit silently with their accusations while Jews-
turned-other sit silently with their demands.
In my house, women pass Friday's hands
over flame, cover their ankles with modesty.
So too, in my house, women *leyn* Torah
no matter the day of the month. Here live
socialists and secularists, *ba'alei teshuvah*
and undecideds. Russians crowd into rooms
jumbled with Ethiopians, Moroccans, Americans.
Chickpeas and olives are hoarded,
some pieces of matzah, a bowl of borscht.
The dying are everywhere: from pogrom
and heavenly plague, starvation, loneliness,
and home-made bomb. In my house,
elders exhort the young to never forget.
The radio blasts Hatikvah and Barbra
(even her Christmas album). Einstein
polishes his calculation, while Baruch Goldstein
his retribution. Screaming children spin
dreidels and old women play Mah Jongg.
Peaceniks argue it out with settlers.
The furniture gets rearranged daily in my house.
Walls change hue on whim. Strangers dance
together at midnight with outstretched arms
and tussle at dawn with mighty fists.

(Inside me, a house.)

Inside the house, bickering boarders.
Inside the house, rent always coming due).



Charlotte Newberger

Charlotte Newberger's support for poetry in Lilith magazine has made possible an expanded number of pages for new poems and reviews of poetry, and this—the first annual Charlotte Newberger Poetry Prize. Charlotte has had a longstanding interest in poetry, and the arts in general. In Chicago, she has been a board member at the inception of several theatres, including the St. Nicholas and National Jewish Theatre, where she was president, and she sat for nearly 20 years on the board of the award-winning Steppenwolf Theatre, as well as The Poetry Center. She currently serves as president of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

Things My Mother Gave Me

by Jennifer Bloustine

I wrote this with a bright green
plastic Frankenstein pen
my mom sent me from Texas.
She would call it a tchotchke,
a nothing
a cheap little piece of mass-produced junk
picked out of the 99 cent bin at McFrugal's.
A stripe of orange shirt, a flat black head
a goofy buck-toothed smile.
This is Frankenstein made nice
clean and safe for the costumed children of America's middle class.

This is the way my mother loves me from afar.
She reaches out of her loneliness to send me little candles
shaped like Pilgrims and pumpkins,
rainbow slinkies,
little grinning cats dressed like Puritans,
presiding over miniature tombstones.
My mother,
who knows something about ghosts
and the dead of the night,
who keeps company with her memories
through sleepless hours,
sends me the sanitized stuff
America buys to stave off our nightmares.

My mother,
who always wanted me to lose weight,
sends me honey cake and cookies,
star-shaped pasta and Passover candy.
Like many Jewish mothers before her,
she tries to love me with food when words fail.
The cookies arrive shattered into crumbs.
Someone else made the honey cake.
I never cooked the pasta.
But she remembers that I like the fruit slices,
and I don't like macaroons.

Honorable Mention

Rebecca Operhall
Sarah Stern

Jennifer Bloustine lives
in Guatemala.